

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_220070

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

Blackwoods' English Classics

General Editor—

J. H. LOBBAN, M.A.

HAZLITT ESSAYS ON POETRY

BLACKWOODS' ENGLISH CLASSICS.

With Frontispieces. In Fcap. 8vo volumes, cloth.

GENERAL EDITOR—J. H. LOBBAN, M.A.,

Editor of 'English Essays'; formerly Examiner in English in the
University of Aberdeen.

MILTON—PARADISE LOST, Books I.-IV.

By J. LOGIE ROBERTSON, M.A., First English Master, Edinburgh
Ladies' College. 2s. 6d.

COWPER—THE TASK, and Minor Poems.

By ELIZABETH LEE, Author of 'A School History of English Literature.'
2s. 6d.

JOHNSON—LIVES OF MILTON AND ADDISON.

By Professor J. W. DUFF, M.A., The Durham College of Science, New-
castle-upon-Tyne. 2s. 6d.

MACAULAY—LIFE OF JOHNSON.

By D. NICHOL SMITH, M.A., Editor of Dryden's 'Essay of Dramatic
Poesy,' &c. 1s. 6d.

GOLDSMITH—TRAVELLER, DESERTED VILLAGE, and other POEMS.

By J. H. LOBBAN, M.A., formerly Assistant-Professor and Examiner in
English, University of Aberdeen. 1s. 6d.

SCOTT—LADY OF THE LAKE.

By W. E. W. COLLINS, M.A. 1s. 6d.

CARLYLE—ESSAY ON BURNS.

By JOHN DOWNIE, M.A., U.F.C. Training College, Aberdeen. 2s. 6d.

POPE—ESSAY ON CRITICISM, RAPE OF THE LOCK, and other POEMS.

By GEORGE SOUTAR, M.A., Litt.D. 2s. 6d.

HAZLITT—ESSAYS ON POETRY.

By D. NICHOL SMITH, M.A., Editor of Dryden's 'Essay of Dramatic
Poesy,' &c. 2s. 6d.

SCOTT—MARMION.

By ALEXANDER MACKIE, M.A., Examiner in English, University of Aber-
deen, Editor of 'Warren Hastings,' &c. 1s. 6d.

WORDSWORTH, COLERIDGE, AND KEATS.

By A. D. INNES, M.A., Editor of 'Julius Cæsar,' &c. &c. 2s. 6d.

MILTON—SAMSON AGONISTES.

By E. H. BLAKENEY, M.A., Headmaster, Borlase, Marlow. 2s. 6d.

LAMB—SELECT ESSAYS.

By AGNES WILSON, Editor of Browning's 'Strafford,' &c., late Senior
English Mistress, East Putney High School. 2s. 6d.

BYRON—Selected Poetry.

By Professor J. W. DUFF, M.A., The Durham
College of Science, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. 3s. 6d.

Other Volumes to follow.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS,
EDINBURGH AND LONDON.



William Hazlitt.

From an Engraving after Bewick.

HAZLITT
ESSAYS ON POETRY

BY

D. NICHOL SMITH, M.A.

EDITOR OF DRYDEN'S 'ESSAY OF DRAMATIC POESY,' ETC.

SECOND IMPRESSION

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MCMVI

All Rights reserved

P R E F A C E.

HAZLITT has been steadily regaining the reputation in which he was held by his contemporaries who knew him. Bulwer Lytton's prediction that Hazlitt would stand to the next age amongst the foremost of the thinkers of his own time may not have been realised; but no competent reader will quarrel with the remark of Thackeray that "Hazlitt was one of the keenest and brightest critics that ever lived." This opinion alone might well be an excuse for a volume of the gems of Hazlitt's criticism. But such a volume needs no excuse nowadays when the development of literary criticism is taking its place as a subject of academic study, and when he has been recognised as "the critics' critic."

Students of Hazlitt are under obligations to the biographies and editions by his grandson, Mr W. Carew Hazlitt, and to the researches of Mr Alexander Ireland. The excellent volume of 'Selections' edited by the latter gives specimens of all Hazlitt's work,

with the aim of showing him in every phase. It is the purpose of the present volume to present Hazlitt as a critic; and its scheme allows the essays to be printed *in extenso*. It gives a consecutive account of the chief phases of English poetry from the age of Elizabeth to the beginning of the nineteenth century, and is prefaced by two general essays on criticism and poetry.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION—	
I. BIOGRAPHICAL	ix
II. HAZLITT'S CRITICISM	xxiii
CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE	xl
ESSAYS ON POETRY—	
I. ON CRITICISM	I
II. ON POETRY IN GENERAL	22
III. THE AGE OF ELIZABETH	51
IV. SPENSER	80
V. SHAKESPEARE	90
VI. MILTON	110
VII. DRYDEN AND POPE	129
VIII. THOMSON AND COWPER	151
IX. WORDSWORTH	166
X. MY FIRST ACQUAINTANCE WITH POETS	181
NOTES	208

INTRODUCTION.

I. BIOGRAPHICAL.

IN the autobiographical essay which concludes the present selection, Hazlitt ascribes the awakening of his critical abilities to his meeting with Coleridge in 1798. "I had no notion then," he says, "that I should ever be able to express my admiration to others in motley imagery or quaint allusion till the light of his genius shone into my soul like the sun's rays glittering in the puddles of the road. I was at that time dumb, inarticulate, helpless, like a worm by the wayside, crushed, bleeding, lifeless. . . . My soul has indeed remained in its original bondage, dark, obscure, with longings infinite and unsatisfied; my heart, shut up in the prison-house of this rude clay, has never found, nor will it ever find, a heart to speak to; but that my understanding also did not remain dumb and brutish, or at length found a language to express itself, I owe to Coleridge." Further on in the same essay he explains the reason of this influence. "Coleridge met me half-way on the ground of philosophy, or I should not have been won over to his imaginative creed."

Hazlitt at this time was a youth of barely twenty—he was born at Maidstone on 10th April 1778—living with his father, who was a Unitarian minister at Wem in Shropshire, and still undecided as to an occupation. “For many years of my life I did nothing but think,” he tells us. “I had nothing else to do but to solve some knotty point, or dip in some abstruse author, or look at the sky, or wander by the pebbled seaside. . . . I took my time to consider whatever occurred to me, and was in no hurry to give a sophistical answer to a question.”¹ He read much, though not omnivorously; at no time could he be called a wide reader, and latterly he preferred reading a book for the tenth time to reading a new one. But for many years his studies were chiefly philosophical. He wrestled with the English and French philosophers from Locke to Hume, and he thought out an essay on the “natural disinterestedness of the human mind.” It is difficult to over-estimate the value to Hazlitt of this early training. It at least confirmed him in the habit of independent and strenuous thought, of which even his most hurried work bears evidence. He may have set too great store on his ability in philosophy, yet there is no denying that a philosophical element has much to do with the worth of his enduring utterances, such as that on the nature of poetry.

He had, in his fifteenth year, at his father's desire, entered the Unitarian College at Hackney; but theology won less of his attention than did philosophy and politics, and he soon gave up all idea of entering the ministry. His father's slender income, however, made it necessary for him to adopt a definite career,

¹ “On Living to One's Self,” in ‘Table Talk.’

and about 1802 he carried out the suggestion of his brother John, his senior by eleven years, that he should study art. In the October of that year he went to Paris, where he remained four months, passed almost entirely at the Louvre in studying and copying the pictures of the old masters. On his return to England he set up as a portrait-painter, and seems to have had little difficulty in finding sitters. But he was disheartened at not being able to satisfy his own ideals, and he finally abandoned painting in despair. His work is said to have shown marked power, and it has even been asserted that he might have become one of the best portrait-painters of his time. But his studies in art were by no means lost. Certain of his most striking characteristics as a critic seem to be directly traceable to his artistic training, and there is no doubt that it enlivened his perception of beauty and strengthened his powers of æsthetic analysis.

One of the last portraits Hazlitt painted was that of Charles Lamb in the dress of a Venetian senator. He had met Lamb in 1804 at the house of William Godwin, as he tells us in his essay on 'My First Acquaintance with Poets.' Southey he met about the same time. Wordsworth he had been introduced to by Coleridge several years before, and he had known Miss Wollstonecraft and Holcroft, as we learn from the same essay. These literary acquaintanceships served likewise to direct him in his final choice of a calling. His writings contain many echoes of conversations with his friends,¹ and he admits that he sometimes suspected himself to be a better reporter of the ideas of other people than

¹ See, for instance, the lecture on Pope, p. 142 and Notes.

expounder of his own.¹ But it was several years yet before his interests became mainly literary. His first publication, which appeared in 1805, was the 'Essay on the Principles of Human Action, an Argument in favour of the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind.' It was followed in 1806 by a pamphlet on 'Free Thoughts on Public Affairs, or Advice to a Patriot,' and in 1807 by 'An Abridgment of the Light of Nature Pursued by A. Tucker.' In the same year he brought out a 'Reply to the Essay on Population by the Rev. T. R. Malthus,' and in 1808 'The Eloquence of the British Senate,' a selection from the speeches of the most distinguished Parliamentary speakers from the reign of Charles I., with biographical and critical notes. Then followed in 1810 'A New and Improved Grammar of the English Tongue,' and in 1816 the 'Memoirs of the late Thomas Holcroft,' which he edited and completed. This miscellaneous list, which contains all his early publications, gives no inkling of the nature of his future work, by which he is alone remembered. They have all been spoken of highly, but the variety of their subjects suggests that Hazlitt was still groping for a definite career. What they show most clearly is that his interests were still mainly philosophical and political. It was not till about 1817 that he began to be known as a literary critic. His political interests remained undiminished to the last, and it is a pity that they did not lose something of their extremeness; but henceforward, till the appearance of his 'Life of Napoleon,' their expression is not so pronounced.

Shortly after settling in London in 1812 he had

¹ See "On Persons one could Wish to have Seen," in 'Winter-slow.'

written the Parliamentary and theatrical reports for the 'Morning Chronicle,' and had contributed to other political papers; and in 1814 he began to write, chiefly on literary subjects, for the 'Edinburgh Review.' His first book of literary sketches appeared in 1817, a collection in two volumes, under the title 'The Round Table,' of essays "on literature, men, and manners," contributed originally to Leigh Hunt's 'Examiner.' In the same year he brought out his first substantial piece of literary criticism, the 'Characters of Shakespeare's Plays.' It was prompted by Coleridge's 'Lectures on Shakespeare,' and, as Hazlitt tells us in the preface, by Schlegel's 'Lectures on the Drama.' "We will confess," he says, "that some little jealousy of the character of the national understanding was not without its share in producing the following undertaking, for we were piqued that it should be reserved for a foreign critic to give reasons for the faith which we English have in Shakespeare." The work was well received, and nearly two editions were sold in three months. But it was attacked by Gifford in the 'Quarterly Review,' and the sale ceased. Gifford's treatment of Hazlitt forms an interesting chapter in the history of reviewing. The fault of the 'Characters' lay not in the book itself but in the politics of its author. Hazlitt was known to be an enemy of the Government and an ardent supporter of the principles of the French Revolution, and he was therefore studiously written down by the Government organs, no matter though his subjects were purely literary. He refers at length to this method of reviewing in his essay 'On Criticism.' With the Government critics, he says, "It is not a question of literary discussion but of political proscrip-

tion. It is a mark of loyalty and patriotism to extend no quarter to those of the opposite party." "I have been followed with one cry of abuse," he says elsewhere, "for not being a Government tool."¹ The world was informed that he "could not write a sentence of common English and could hardly spell his own name, because he was not a friend to the restoration of the Bourbons, and had the assurance to write 'Characters of Shakespeare's Plays' in a style of criticism somewhat different from Mr Gifford's."² The unscrupulous attacks in the 'Quarterly' prompted Hazlitt in 1819 to write the trenchant 'Letter to William Gifford, Esq.' Whatever may be thought of Hazlitt's political prejudices, it cannot be denied that he was the victim of great injustice. Nowadays these attacks on Hazlitt only cast a slur on Gifford's critical honesty. But at the time they served their purpose. They checked the growth of Hazlitt's reputation, and they made him be regarded with suspicion. Unfortunately this indiscriminate and incessant abuse helped to embitter a proud nature which was nervous and sensitive in the extreme, but not wanting in tenderness and a genuine generosity.

In 1817 and 1818 Hazlitt contributed to the 'Champion,' the 'Examiner,' the 'Yellow Dwarf,' and the 'Scots Magazine,' and in the latter year published a collected edition of his theatrical notices under the title, 'A View of the English Stage, or a Series of Dramatic Criticisms.' A similar collection of his political articles, entitled 'Political Essays, with Sketches of Public Characters,'

¹ "Whether Genius is Conscious of its Powers," in the 'Plain Speaker.'

² "Mr Gifford," in the 'Spirit of the Age.'

appeared in 1819. He was now engaged on the work to which he owes most of his reputation, his lectures on English literature. As a lecturer he was not altogether successful. He had abundant enthusiasm, but his delivery appears to have been faulty, and it is doubtful if there was much sympathy between him and his listeners. His lecture on poetry would be above the heads of most audiences. Despite the general lucidity of his style, his remarks are often such as can be fully appreciated only when read. He wrote all his lectures, and they accordingly bear a strong resemblance to his essays. In the present selection, for instance, three of the ten extracts were contributed to magazines or came out in book form, but there is nothing in their manner to distinguish them from those which were originally spoken. The first of his three great courses on English literature—he had in 1812, while philosophical interests still dominated, given a course on the English metaphysicians¹—was on the English poets. It was delivered at the Surrey Institution in 1818 and published immediately afterwards. In the following year he lectured on the English comic writers. Taken as a whole, this is commonly said to be his best course. Its judgments have generally been accepted, and its quality is well sustained. The lectures on poetry may contain passages of unequalled excellence, but they fall off in value as he proceeds. In the opening lecture he speaks from a full mind; by the last lecture, which deals with the living poets, he has lost his enthusiasm for his subject, and we have the uncomfortable suspicion that he is unwillingly making out the course to the required

¹ Fragments of these lectures were published in his 'Literary Remains,' edited by his son in 1836.

length.¹ In the best parts of these two courses of lectures he speaks on authors with whom he had had long and reverent acquaintance. In his third course he essayed a subject in which he was a novice. His lectures on the dramatic literature of the age of Elizabeth (1820) were the result of only six weeks' study. When they had been arranged for, he went down to the country—to Winterslow Hut in Wiltshire, his favourite haunt—with about a dozen volumes of the old dramatists, but in complete ignorance of them, and after a stay of six weeks, we are told, “came back to London fully impregnated with the subject, with his thoughts fully made up upon it, and with all his lectures written. And he then appeared to comprehend the character and merits of the old writers more thoroughly than any other person, although he had so lately entered upon the subject.”² We could have no better illustration of his critical acumen. His opinions on the Elizabethans were only first impressions, but that he would have modified them in any way we have no reason to believe. He prided himself on his continuity of impression. “In matters of taste and feeling,” he says, “one proof that my conclusions have not been quite shallow and hasty is the circumstance of their having been lasting.”³ Continuity of impression often means intellectual stagnation, but what is remarkable in the case of Hazlitt is that his first impressions did not call for revision.

¹ Accordingly in the present selection Hazlitt's views on contemporary poetry are represented by the account of Wordsworth in the ‘Spirit of the Age.’

² So said Barry Cornwall (Bryan Waller Procter), who lent him the dozen volumes.

³ “A Farewell to Essay-Writing,” in ‘Winterslow.’

In the year in which he delivered his last course of lectures, he began to contribute to magazines the articles which give him his fame as an essayist. The 'Round Table' (1817) is worthy of its author's maturer powers, but it has not the finish and masterly ease of the later collections, and its essays are much shorter and not of outstanding interest. In 1821 he brought out the first volume of 'Table-Talk, or Original Essays,' a second following in 1822; and four years later appeared, in two volumes, the 'Plain-Speaker, Opinions on Books, Men, and Things.' These two collections are made up chiefly of articles contributed to the 'London Magazine' and the 'New Monthly,' and exhibit fully in their great range of subject the variety of Hazlitt's attainments, though some of his finest essays, such as that on 'My First Acquaintance with Poets,' appeared first in book form in the posthumous collections edited by his son, 'Sketches and Essays' (1839) and 'Winterslow : Essays and Characters written there' (1850). Between the publication of his 'Table Talk' and 'Plain-Speaker' he brought out 'Characteristics in the Manner of La Rochefoucauld's Maxims' (1823), 'Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England' (1824), and a volume of 'Selections from the English Poets' (1824) in which he had the assistance of Lamb and Barry Cornwall; and he contributed in 1824 to the seventh edition of the 'Encyclopædia Britannica' the article on the Fine Arts. But more important than these, and by some considered his best work, is the 'Spirit of the Age, or Contemporary Portraits' (1825), a collection of articles on such men as Byron, Scott, Coleridge, Southey, Wordsworth, Lamb, Jeffrey,

Brougham, Godwin, and Cobbett.¹ Many of the opinions here given had already been set forth in the lectures and essays, but they have now fuller and more chastened expression. Thus the account of Wordsworth, which is included in the present selection, is the same in spirit with that which occurs in the lecture on the living poets, but it is a less hurried piece of work, free from the bluntness of the earlier description, and much more suggestive of its subject's worth and personality. There are unfortunately passages where political prejudice runs riot, as it will do at odd moments in all that Hazlitt writes; but it cannot make us blind to the many pieces of masterly analysis. When politics did not interfere, Hazlitt had in an unusual degree the faculty of seeing the real worth of a man free from the refraction of contemporary circumstance. Courage was necessary to publish such a book; but by this time Hazlitt was callous of public opinion, and indeed at no time would fear of giving offence have stayed him from uttering a plain truth.

Home life had afforded him no comfort. In 1808 he had married a Miss Sarah Stoddart, a friend of the Lambs, and about two years his senior. Though in many respects a most estimable woman and possessed of considerable intellectual power, she was the worst sort of wife for a man of Hazlitt's sensitive, wilful nature. She was unsympathetic and tactless, had no idea of household management, was careless in her dress, and provokingly indifferent to his abilities. Hazlitt seems

¹ The article on Cobbett was issued originally in the first volume of 'Table Talk' (1821), and was not included in the first edition of 'Spirit of the Age,' but appeared in the Paris edition of the same year. It is to be noted that both Shelley and Keats are omitted.

to have drifted into marriage under no compulsion of affection. It was plainly his own experiences which prompted him to say in his 'Advice to a Schoolboy,' "If you ever marry, I would wish you to marry the woman you like. Do not be guided by the recommendation of friends. Nothing will atone for or overcome an original distaste. It will only increase from intimacy; and if you are to live separate it is better not to come together. There is no use in dragging a chain through life unless it binds one to the object we love. . . . Be not in haste to marry nor to engage your affections where there is no probability of a return." Hazlitt and his wife had been living apart for some time, when, in August 1820, he found in his landlady's daughter, named Sarah Walker, "the only woman that ever made me think she loved me."¹ She appears to have been a commonplace creature, but Hazlitt's infatuation invested her with the virtues of a goddess. For a time his frenzied passion so far mastered him that his friends thought him "substantially insane." One would gladly forget this ugly episode in Hazlitt's life, but he has himself recorded it in a remarkable but ill-considered publication, the 'Liber Amoris, or the New Pygmalion' (1823), a collection of letters written to her or about her, with accounts of several of their conversations. Hazlitt was at last disillusioned; but in the meantime, in June 1822, he and his wife had succeeded in obtaining a divorce under Scots law. Within two years he was married again, and apparently as unhappily as before. His second wife, a Mrs Bridgewater, had some money, and they started in the autumn of 1824 for a Continental trip. They travelled about

¹ 'Liber Amoris,' p. 29.

for some months in France, Switzerland, and Italy;¹ but Hazlitt returned to London alone, and shortly afterwards received a letter from his wife telling him they had parted for ever.

Even his friendships failed, even that with "Lamb, the frolic and the gentle," though luckily their estrangement passed. "I have quarrelled with almost all my old friends," he frankly admits.² "Most of the friends I have seen," he says elsewhere, "have turned out the bitterest enemies, or cold, uncomfortable acquaintance. Old companions are like meats served up too often, that lose their relish and wholesomeness."³ His essays are not merely rich in personal references, but often deal directly with his own character and experiences. It is he himself who gives us most help in solving the riddle of his character. "Both from disposition and habit," he says, "I can *assume* nothing in word, look, or manner. I cannot steal a march upon public opinion in any way. My standing upright, speaking loud, entering a room gracefully, proves nothing; therefore I neglect these ordinary means of recommending myself to the good graces and admiration of strangers."⁴ He was wanting in social instincts, and could not make allowances for the foibles of others. He was awkward and shy in company, though, as he hints, his shyness was closely connected with pride.⁴ He was apt to be careless in his dress, and had a strong objection to

¹ While on this tour he contributed to the 'Morning Chronicle' a series of letters on the places he visited. They were collected into a volume in 1826 under the title 'Notes of a Journey in France and Italy.'

² "On the Pleasure of Hating," in the 'Plain-Speaker.'

³ "On Living to One's Self," in 'Table-Talk.'

⁴ "A Farewell to Essay-Writing," in 'Winterslow.'

shaking hands. Leigh Hunt said that shaking hands with him was like shaking the fin of a fish.¹ Sensitive as he was, he did not object to adverse criticism if it was sincere. But he had an uncontrollable hatred of all forms of hypocrisy. "I have often been reproached with extravagance," he says—and thereby gives us perhaps the chief clue to his elusive character—"for considering things only in their abstract principles, and with heat and ill-temper for getting into a passion about what no ways concerned me. If any one wishes to see me quite calm, they may cheat me in a bargain or tread upon my toes; but a truth repelled, a sophism repeated, totally disconcerts me, and I lose all patience. I am not, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, a *good-natured man*—that is, many things annoy me besides what interferes with my own ease and interest. I hate a lie; a piece of injustice wounds me to the quick, though nothing but the report of it reach me. Therefore I have made many enemies and few friends."²

It is not surprising that such a man should speak of "that great baby the world"³ and of "the world that has deceived me."⁴ He even confesses that he would be glad almost to change his acquaintance with pictures and books, and certainly what he knows of mankind, for anybody's ignorance of them. Yet he was not a misanthrope. One of his chief delights was a "careless, indolent chat," as he calls it, and he excelled in conversation when in congenial company. Nor had disap-

¹ See the 'Memoirs of Hazlitt,' vol. i. p. 239 n.

² "On Depth and Superficiality," in the 'Plain-Speaker.'

³ "On the Spirit of Monarchy," in the 'Liberal' (1823).

⁴ "A Farewell to Essay-Writing," in 'Winterslow.'

pointment warped his judgment. It must be remembered that in the whole range of English literature there is perhaps no critic whose admiration of what he likes is more whole-hearted. There may have been little or no solace in friendship with Hazlitt; but we are too apt to remember only his quarrels and his petulance. Among several testimonies as to the worth of his character, there are two which have a special interest as being by friends with whom he had quarrelled. "I really believe Hazlitt," said Leigh Hunt, "to be a disinterested and suffering man, who feels public calamities as other men do private ones"; and Charles Lamb felt constrained to refer to him as "one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing."

Towards the end of his life he devoted himself almost entirely to his 'Life of Napoleon Buonaparte.' It is his longest work—it is indeed his only work planned on a large scale, for his other books are mostly collections of essays or lectures—and he hoped to be remembered by it. The first two volumes appeared in 1828 and the remaining two followed in 1830. Like so many of his contemporaries, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, he had approved of the principles of the French Revolution. He regarded Bonaparte as the champion of popular liberty, a hero of democracy who had humbled the pride of kings; but with his characteristic "pertinacity of opinion" his admiration did not change when the Bonaparte of the Revolution became the Napoleon of the Empire. In Hazlitt's eyes he had triumphed over those who claimed mankind as their inheritance by a divine right, and had saved a people from the indignity of being handed over like a herd of cattle to a particular family and chained to the foot of a legitimate

throne.¹ He was "the child and champion of the Revolution": he could not divest himself of this character even when he became a despot, nor could Hazlitt regard him but as such even when at war with Britain. It is hardly surprising that Hazlitt's book was not a success. Its sale was seriously checked by Sir Walter Scott's 'Life of Napoleon' (1827), written from the Tory and Legitimist point of view; but it could not in any circumstances, and despite its admirable descriptive passages, have improved his reputation. To add to his misfortunes the publisher failed, and he received nothing for the work which had occupied him almost entirely for about three years. As a consequence his own affairs became involved, and at a time when his health was steadily declining. He brought out the 'Conversations of James Northcote, Esq., R.A.,' a collection of articles contributed in 1826-27 to the 'New Monthly Magazine'; he collaborated with Northcote on a 'Life of Titian'; and he returned to essay-writing: but at the end he had to appeal to the generosity of friends. Yet his last words were, "Well, I've had a happy life." He died in London on 18th September 1830, leaving behind him an amount of miscellaneous writing of such rare value that we wonder how he did not enshrine his abilities in a work of more conspicuous form.

II. HAZLITT'S CRITICISM.

Hazlitt appears to have misapplied his abilities in giving up three of the most valuable years of his life

¹ See his Preface, which, for some unexplained reason, appears as the opening passage of vol. iii.

to his 'Napoleon Buonaparte,' an apologetic biography prompted by political bias. He certainly underestimated the value of his other work when he based on this history his hopes of fame. He is now remembered chiefly as a literary critic. It is sometimes said¹ that he is at his best in his essays—and indeed there is no doubt that his essays contain his finest writing² and entitle him to be classed with Addison and Lamb; but his work as an essayist is of considerably less importance than his achievement as a critic. And even as an essayist he is at his best when he deals with art or literature. Unfortunately his criticisms are mostly occasional in form. With the exception of the 'Characters of Shakespeare's Plays,'³ they were written to be delivered as lectures or to appear as magazine articles. But the opinions expressed in the lectures on the English poets, the English comic writers, and the Elizabethan dramatists, as well as in some of the miscellaneous essays, make Hazlitt one of the greatest of literary critics.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century English criticism underwent a far-reaching change. The classical school of criticism, which had begun with Dryden and was continued by Addison and Pope, had culminated in the 'Lives of the Poets.' Johnson judged everything by a definite code, representing the literary principles of his own century. His model of English poetic excellence was Pope; he doubted the possibility

¹ See Mr Leslie Stephen's essay on Hazlitt in 'Hours in a Library,' vol. ii., and his article in the 'Dictionary of National Biography.'

² In the present selection, for instance, the essay on "My First Acquaintance with Poets" will be found to surpass the rest of the volume in point of literary excellence.

³ And of some of the essays in the 'Spirit of the Age.'

of any further improvement in versification, and believed it was only by "new sentiments and new images" that Pope's successors could claim distinction. As a critic of the correct or classical school of poetry Johnson is unrivalled; but he went astray in his judgments on poetry which fell outside the sphere of his code. The tendency of criticism at his time—and more markedly in France than in England—was to deal unduly with the externals of literature, and even to reduce all writing to a matter of mechanism. It did not, in Hazlitt's words, "reflect the colours, the light and shade, the soul and body of a work." It consisted for the most part in exposition and in measurement by a fixed standard. Macaulay has well said of Johnson that he decided literary questions like a lawyer. Even when he speaks of his own poetic masters, such as Dryden and Pope, he manifests no more sympathy for them than does the judge for the prisoner at the bar. He has none of the sympathetic revelation which was to become one of the main features of the new criticism.

In the interval before the complete establishment of the romantic school, the 'Edinburgh Review' (founded 1802) and the 'Quarterly Review' (1808) were the chief dispensers of literary opinion.¹ However great their authority, their criticism is of comparatively small

¹ In the twenty years between the 'Lives of the Poets' and the first number of the 'Edinburgh Review,' literary criticism in England was at a low ebb. It is represented by such general or philosophical treatises as Blair's 'Rhetoric' (1783), Alison's 'Essay on Taste' (1790), and Sir Uvedale Price's 'Essay on the Picturesque' (1794), and by satires such as Gifford's 'Baviad' (1794) and 'Mæviad' (1795), and Mathias's 'Pursuits of Literature' (1794). But in 1798 Wordsworth heralded the new criticism in his Preface to the 'Lyrical Ballads.'

intrinsic value. They discarded the classical code only to give full rein to the reviewer's whim. Their verdicts typify and reflect the unsettled state of English literature before romanticism gained complete mastery, but both in spirit and in attitude they had more in common with the past era in criticism than with that which was to come.

The men who have the chief credit of establishing the new criticism are Coleridge and Hazlitt. Unfortunately the work of Coleridge is very fragmentary. He delivered several courses of lectures, but, unlike Hazlitt, he did not publish them on their completion, and we are now indebted to notes and newspaper reports for what we know of them. It is noteworthy that both Coleridge and Hazlitt felt called upon to discuss in their lectures the nature of poetry. Such a question had not engaged the attention of the older critics; and the treatment of it by Coleridge and Hazlitt points to a greater philosophic depth in the new criticism. Hazlitt defines poetry not as something to be found only in books or as a branch of authorship, but as the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself. Wherever there is a sense of beauty, or power, or harmony, "*there* is poetry in its birth"; poetry is the stuff of which our life is made, and all that is worth remembering in life is the poetry of it.¹ This definition not merely renounced the strict limits which the eighteenth century had cherished, but even denied the possibility of a critical code. Coleridge's definitions, though of less value in themselves, pointed to the same conclusion. "Critics are too apt to forget," he says in a passage which indicates with admirable clearness

¹ Pp. 22, 23.

the new departure in criticism, "that rules are but means to an end; consequently, where the ends are different the rules must be likewise so. We must have ascertained what the end is before we can determine what the rules ought to be."¹ Criticism consisted no longer in a formal report, so to speak, drawn up with official impartiality. It now required an intelligent sympathy on the part of the critic with the poet's aim. It had passed from the expository and formal to the interpretative and æsthetic.²

Hazlitt has himself given us an essay on the different kinds of criticism. In many respects the essay is disappointing. It is marred by a satirical or disparaging tone, and reveals too much of Hazlitt's own prejudices; but there are passages which call for its inclusion in the present volume. Hazlitt points out what is to be avoided in criticism, and what he here proscribes he is never guilty of in his own writing. More than this, he defines what a genuine criticism should do, and the definition describes exactly Hazlitt's own criticism: it

¹ 'Biographia Literaria,' chap. ii., footnote.

² The aims and methods of the new criticism obtained some years later their clearest expression in an essay by Carlyle. "First," he says, "we must have made plain to ourselves what the poet's aim really and truly was, how the task he had to do stood before his own eye, and how far, with such means as it afforded him, he has fulfilled it. Secondly, we must have decided whether and how far this aim, this task of his, accorded, not with *us* and our individual crotchets, and the crotchets of our little senate where we give or take the law, but with human nature and the nature of things at large; with the universal principles of poetic beauty, not as they stand written in our text-books, but in the hearts and imaginations of all men" (Essay on Goethe, 1828). Herein Carlyle goes beyond Hazlitt; but the essentials of the above statement will be found in Hazlitt's definition of poetry and the remarks in the essay "On Criticism" on the disagreement between French and English taste.

“reflects the colours, the light and shade, the soul and body of a work.” He despises those critics who can deal only with the externals of a poem, as if it were a piece of formal architecture, and who tell us everything about a work and nothing of it. As for himself, to use his own metaphor, he always fixes his ideas at the centre and never lets them fly to the circumference. As a critic of the formal element in art, Hazlitt is comparatively weak. He cares little for the execution in comparison with the conception. The greatest painter, he says in one of his essays on art,¹ is he who can put the greatest quantity of expression into his works. He considers a knowledge of the art of painting to be unnecessary for a competent appreciation of a picture, and he even maintains that if a picture is admired by none but painters, there is a strong presumption that the picture is bad. He does not for a moment overlook the need of proficiency in the mechanical work of execution, whether in poetry or painting; but however admirable the means may be, he refuses to neglect the end towards which the means are employed. There are many points of similarity in Hazlitt’s treatment of poetry and painting. Indeed, it is not too much to say that in spirit and manner his criticisms of poetry and painting are essentially the same. He draws no sharp dividing line between the two arts, and what he says of the one sheds a strong light on his treatment of the other. His essays on poetry abound with references to Raphael and Michael Angelo, Titian and Guido, Claude Lorraine and Poussin, Rembrandt and

¹ In Leigh Hunt’s ‘Literary Examiner,’ 1823, No. 5 : reprinted in Mr Alexander Ireland’s useful volume of ‘Selections from Hazlitt,’ p. 417 *et seq.*

Rubens ; he devoted one of his lectures on the English comic writers to a criticism of Hogarth ; and we have further proof of the identity of his attitude to poetry and painting in the sudden transition in the essay 'On Criticism' from the formal literary critics of the French school to the connoisseurs who deal only with the mechanical circumstances of a picture.

The chief value, however, of the essay 'On Criticism' lies in the passage in which Hazlitt refers to the impossibility of reconciling different tastes in literature. No uniformity of opinion can be hoped for between those who are all for elegance in style and those who admire simplicity, or between those who favour and those who dislike the school of Pope. Such differences of opinion, he points out, will last as long as the difference with which men's minds are originally constituted, and the most that can be hoped for is toleration of other tastes. He asserts—what seems obvious to us nowadays, but did not by any means savour of a platitude at his time—that the disagreement between the French and English taste cannot be reconciled till the French become English or the English French. "Both are right in what they admire ; both are wrong in condemning the others for what they admire. We see the defects of Racine ; they see the faults of Shakespeare probably in an exaggerated point of view. But we may be sure of this, that when we see nothing but grossness and barbarism, or insipidity and verbiage, in a writer that is the god of a nation's idolatry, it is we and not they who want true taste and feeling." Hazlitt not merely shows the futility of "capricious and arbitrary rules" in criticism, and of the "given standard of imaginary perfection," but he was one of the first

to assert that a literature reflects the genius of a nation, and that accordingly no man, though he may have his personal preferences, has a right to proclaim the comparative merits or demerits of a literature alien in spirit to his own. Once this was fully realised, it was but a small step to the sympathy and catholicity of the method which was urged by Carlyle.¹ Of the modern developments in criticism Hazlitt gives no suggestion. We will search in vain for any trace of that method which treats a man and his work as the product of his race, time, and environment, or of the evolutionary method which treats a work as directly influenced by previous works, or of the recent comparative method which endeavours to show the relationship between similar tendencies in different literatures. All these methods imply a thorough historical knowledge and a sense of a literature's life and growth. But Hazlitt's historical knowledge is faulty, and he shows nowhere any sense of progress, whether in a literature or an individual author. What he describes is essentially a unity, an embodiment complete in itself and not necessarily related to anything else. He discusses an author *in toto*, and is indifferent to the order in which his works appeared. Similarly, he has no concern for the relation in point of time of one author to another. Pope might have been Dryden's predecessor as far as Hazlitt's treatment would indicate, and there is nothing in the account of Shakespeare and Milton to suggest

¹ See the quotation from Carlyle, footnote *supra*, and consult Professor Vaughan's Introduction to 'English Literary Criticism,' in which, however, justice is not done to Hazlitt's plea for catholicity of taste.

their proximity in date. "If," he says, "a man leaves behind him any work which is a model of its kind, we have no right to ask whether he could do anything else, or how he did it, or how long he was about it."¹

Though Hazlitt was at one with Coleridge and the other critics of the romantic school as regards the main doctrines of criticism, there were several points in which he was directly opposed to them. He did not share their admiration of their fellows. His political bias and petulant, suspicious turn of mind made him at times even unjust. He appreciates the true value of Wordsworth's poetry, and occasionally could not be more hearty in its praise; but he seems to find a distinct pleasure in enlarging on the poet's foibles. The account of Coleridge is marred by a feeling of disappointment at the change in his political views. In the account of Scott in the 'Spirit of the Age,' he credits the "Scotch Novels" with a "political bearing," and gleefully suggests that they will not make "a single convert to the beauty of Legitimacy," as if Scott had thought that "in restoring the claims of the Stuarts by the courtesy of romance, the House of Brunswick are more firmly seated in point of fact, and the Bourbons, by collateral reasoning, become legitimate." He cannot read Byron without being continually reminded of his peerage, and he dislikes the "noble author" accordingly. He cares little for Shelley, and might well be entirely ignorant of Keats. He went astray in his judgments of his contemporaries because he would not consider their work in itself. He was biassed by acquaintance with them, or by knowledge or report of them; and though he analyses their char-

¹ "On Genius and Common-Sense," in 'Table Talk.'

acter with masterly precision, he did not treat their work with that disinterestedness which he generally shows in criticising the older authors.) He knew this himself. He had written, in what he calls "a strain of somewhat peevish invective," an account of Byron when the news came of Byron's death. Had he known that he was writing Byron's epitaph, he says he would have done it with a different feeling, for at the touch of death "the drossy particles fall off, the irritable, the personal, the gross, and mingle with the dust." It is the fault of Hazlitt that he did not try to prevent the "drossy particles" from interfering with his judgments on contemporary literature.

If Hazlitt is, on the whole, unjust to his contemporaries, he had at least a truer appreciation than most of them of the eighteenth century. Wordsworth and Coleridge "spoke with intolerance of Pope,"¹ and denied his claim to be considered a poet; Hazlitt had the insight to perceive, and the independence to proclaim, the merits of Pope in the thick of the romantic revival, of which in certain respects he was an ardent champion. The question whether Pope was a poet he considers hardly worthy of discussion. With genuine catholicity of taste, he gives Pope his due as the poet not of nature but of art, and points out the absurdity of those who, neglectful of the merits of his verse, condemn the absence of qualities to which it makes no claim. Hazlitt knew the literature of the eighteenth century better than most of his contemporaries, and in several points he preserved its attitude. A good instance of this is seen in his use of the word "Gothic." To Pope and the classical school it was synonymous with "bar-

¹ P. 204.

barous," but to Coleridge¹ and the romantic school it meant "sublime." Hazlitt uses it in the older sense, coupling it with such words as "grotesque," "barbarous," and "idle."² He agreed with the eighteenth century, and differed from Coleridge in being indifferent to the middle ages; but, on the other hand, Coleridge's catholicity failed him in his regard for the classical. "On this occasion Coleridge spoke of Virgil's 'Georgics,' but not well. I do not think he had much feeling for the classical or elegant."³

Hazlitt contrasts with Coleridge also in the matter of foreign influence. Coleridge's interest in the problems of criticism, as in so much else, dates from his visit to Germany. As a critic of Shakespeare he owed much successively to Lessing, Kant and Schiller, and Schelling. Hazlitt, on the other hand, knew no foreign influence, and could be reproached even with ignorance of the main features of German philosophy.⁴ Despite his love of Napoleon and hatred of Wellington, and his political utterances, which are sometimes little less than treasonable, there was much of the sturdy Englishman in Hazlitt. "We are something in ourselves, nothing when we try to ape others,"⁵ he says, and this might well have been his own motto. His taste in poetry was formed and matured on Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, and in prose his ideal was Burke. The only foreign literature he knew well was French, though he had a great admiration of Dante and Boccaccio.

¹ See Coleridge's lecture on the Middle Ages (1818), 'Miscellanies, Aesthetic and Literary,' edited by T. Ashe, p. 92.

² Pp. 47, 78, and 168.

³ P. 204.

⁴ See De Quincey's Essay on Charles Lamb ('Works,' edited by Prof. Masson, vol. v. p. 231).

⁵ P. 77.

But the romantic school despised French literature because of its classical principles; Wordsworth, we read, condemned "all French writers (as well of poetry as prose) in the lump."¹ So Hazlitt stood apart from his contemporaries again, and did much to remove the stigma placed on French literature by prejudice or ignorance.

What Jeffrey said of the 'Characters of Shakespeare's Plays' in his criticism of it in the 'Edinburgh Review' is equally true of all Hazlitt's work: "The book is written less to tell the reader what Mr Hazlitt *knows* about Shakespeare or his writings than to explain to them what he *feels* about them, and *why* he feels so, and thinks that all who profess to love poetry should feel so likewise."² Hazlitt was indifferent to the facts and circumstances of a book, and accordingly he is often inaccurate. But what he admired he read and read again till it was ever present to him, and he analysed the source of the enjoyment it gave him. "I am nothing if not critical," he says;³ but he had the truest appreciation of works for which he had a reverent regard. As a critic of works of genius Hazlitt is unexcelled. His shortcomings are noticeable only in his treatment of those authors for whom he had no true sympathy, or whom he disliked or suspected for other than literary considerations. Hazlitt seems to have known this, for in an imaginary dialogue he puts into the mouth of Lamb a statement which points unerringly to his merits as a critic: "I always believe you when you

¹ P. 177.

² 'Contributions to the Edinburgh Review,' by Francis Jeffrey (3 vols.), vol. ii. p. 69.

³ "Disadvantages of Intellectual Superiority," in 'Table Talk.'

praise, not always when you condemn.”¹ (He is never guilty, with all the ardour of his admiration, of praising a defect. He omits to praise excellences, he may even condemn unaccountably what are generally recognised as excellences; but such faults need never mislead the reader’s judgment, as they generally bear on their face the sign of personal animus or caprice. Hazlitt had in a remarkable degree keenness of insight, vividness of perception, and appreciation of beauty, and these qualities unite with his gift of expression to make him one of the most suggestive of writers, and, to quote the happiest estimate of him which we have, “the critics’ critic.”²

Hazlitt’s knowledge of his favourite authors is shown by his continued use of quotations. He knew Shakespeare, Milton, and some other writers, but chiefly Shakespeare, so thoroughly that their phrases lingered in his mind and continually presented themselves to him as the best means of expressing his own thought. The merit of this habit of quotation has been debated. It has been defended on the ground that it trails after it a line of golden associations and makes the page shine like cloth of gold; but it laid him open to the ridicule of contemporaries such as Christopher North and to the stern reproof of De Quincey³—and there is no denying that he carries it to excess. Hazlitt has the double

¹ “The Vatican,” in ‘*Criticisms on Art.*’

² See Prof. Saintsbury’s ‘*Nineteenth Century Literature*,’ p. 187. See also the essay on Hazlitt in Prof. Saintsbury’s ‘*Essays in English Literature, 1780-1860.*’

³ See Mr Alexander Ireland’s ‘*Selections from Hazlitt*,’ p. 1; ‘*Blackwood’s Magazine*,’ July 1824; and De Quincey’s *Essay on Charles Lamb* (‘*Works*,’ edited by Prof. Masson, vol. v. p. 236 *et seq.*)

reputation of being one of the largest quoters and also one of the most inaccurate. He wrote down his quotations as he remembered them and took little or no pains to verify them. He is open to the charge, too, of repeating the same quotations again and again. This is not so serious a fault, however, as the recurrence of ideas in language often nearly identical. The notes to the present volume instance several striking parallel passages, and the text even is not free from repetitions. The best that can be said for these is that they exemplify his "continuity of opinion," and sometimes help to make his meaning more clear.

In an autobiographical passage in one of his essays Hazlitt divides expository writing into two main classes, and his description of them is so suggestive of his own characteristics that it demands quotation at length.

"I was once applied to in a delicate emergency to write an article on a difficult subject for an Encyclopædia, and was advised to take time and give it a systematic and scientific form, to avail myself of all the knowledge that was to be obtained on the subject, and arrange it with clearness and method. I made answer that as to the first I had taken time to do all that I ever pretended to do, as I had thought incessantly on different matters for twenty years of my life ; that I had no particular knowledge of the subject in question, and no head for arrangement ; and that the utmost I could do in such a case would be, when a systematic and scientific article was prepared, to write marginal notes upon it, to insert a remark or illustration of my own (not to be found in former Encyclopædias), or to suggest a better definition than had been offered in the text. There are two sorts of writing. The first is compilation, and consists in collecting and stating all that is already known of any question in the best possible manner for the benefit of the uninformed reader. An author of

this class is a very learned amanuensis of other people's thoughts. The second sort proceeds on an entirely different principle. Instead of bringing down the account of knowledge to the point at which it has already arrived, it professes to start from that point on the strength of the writer's individual reflections, and, supposing the reader in possession of what is already known, supplies deficiencies, fills up certain blanks, and quits the beaten road in search of new facts of observation or sources of feeling. It is in vain to object to this last style that it is disjointed, disproportioned, and irregular. It is merely a set of additions and corrections to other men's works, or to the common stock of human knowledge, printed separately. You might as well expect a continued chain of reasoning in the notes to a book. It skips all the trite, intermediate, level common-places of the subject, and only stops at the difficult passages of the human mind, or touches on some striking point that has been overlooked in previous editions. A view of a subject, to be connected and regular, cannot be all new. A writer will always be liable to be charged either with paradox or commonplace, either with dulness or affectation. . . . I grant it is best to unite solidity with show, general information with particular ingenuity. This is the pattern of a perfect style; but I myself do not pretend to be a perfect writer. In fine, we do not banish light French wines from our tables, or refuse to taste sparkling champagne when we can get it, because it has not the body of old port. Besides, I do not know that dulness is strength, or that an observation is slight because it is striking. Mediocrity, insipidity, want of character, is the great fault."¹

Hazlitt's writings bear out his admission about his want of system. His account of the age of Elizabeth might be brought forward to disprove his confession that he had no head for arrangement, but his essays

¹ "On Genius and Common-Sense," in 'Table Talk.'

‘On Criticism’ and ‘My First Acquaintance with Poets’ will be found to be better examples of his usual method. What he says of Burke may well be applied to himself—he pours out his mind upon paper. His “incessant thought on different matters for twenty years” had stocked his mind with mature opinions, and when necessity made him take up his pen, he wrote with ease and with profusion, careless of the order in which his ideas were expressed. He never once gives the impression that he is groping his way. He did not pride himself on his writing. “What abortions are these essays!” he says. “What errors, what ill-pieced transitions, what crooked reasons, what lame conclusions! How little is made out, and that little how ill! Yet they are the best I can do. I endeavour to recollect all I have ever observed or thought upon a subject, and to express it as nearly as I can. Instead of writing on four subjects at a time, it is as much as I can manage to keep the thread of one discourse clear and unentangled. I have also time on my hands to correct my opinions and polish my periods; but the one I cannot, and the other I will not do.”¹ In his early days he wrote slowly and with great difficulty. He records how his first interview with Coleridge induced him to try for the twentieth time to express an idea which he had cherished for years, but how he could not get beyond a few meagre sentences. Necessity soon made him prove the truth of the Johnsonian dictum that a man may write at any time if he will set himself doggedly to it. Latterly he could say that writing cost him nothing, and that he had merely to “unfold the book and volume of

¹ “The Indian Jugglers,” in ‘Table-Talk.’

the brain" and transcribe the characters he saw there as mechanically as any one might copy the letters in a sampler.¹ What he wrote was sent straight to the press with little or no revision, and his manuscripts were remarkable for their cleanness: he is even said to have confessed that he would not allow of an erasure or interlineation. He purposely gave much of his writing a conversational character, as likely to procure variety, richness, and spontaneity, and to this end he favoured rapidity of execution. "The eagerness of composition strikes out sparkles of fancy, and runs the thoughts more naturally and closely into one another. There may be less formal method, but there is more life, and spirit, and truth."² This rapidity sometimes makes him guilty of a slipshod expression and of a phrase whose meaning is not clear. As his own ideas have become so familiar to him, he forgets that they may need to be explained to others. But such faults are rare. He had no ambitions as a writer. He tells us he hates his style to be known, as he hates all idiosyncrasy.³ He uses, to quote him once again, "plain words and popular modes of construction," and "would almost as soon coin the currency of the realm as counterfeit the King's English."⁴ But there is no mistaking Hazlitt's style. We may know it by its faults, the most notable of which is an exaggerated use of quotations; but we can recognise it more easily by the sinewy, nervous strength which makes him one of the most stimulating of authors.

¹ "On Application to Study," in the 'Plain Speaker.'

² Ibid.

³ "Disadvantages of Intellectual Superiority," in 'Table-Talk.'

⁴ "On Familiar Style," in 'Table-Talk.'

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE.

- 1778. Hazlitt born at Maidstone, Kent (10th April).
 - 1778. Death of Chatham, Voltaire, and Rousseau.
 - 1779. Johnson's 'Lives of the Poets' (1779-1781).
- 1780. Hazlitt in South Ireland with his parents (1780-1783).
 - 1782. American Independence acknowledged.
- 1783. Hazlitt in America with his parents (1783-1787).
 - 1784. Death of Dr Johnson.
 - 1785. Cowper's 'Task.'
 - 1786. Burns's 'Poems' (Kilmarnock edition).
Birth of De Quincey.
- 1787. Hazlitt returns to England with his parents; lives at Wem in Shropshire.
 - 1788. Gibbon's 'Decline and Fall' completed.
Birth of Byron.
The 'Times' founded.
 - 1789. The French Revolution.
 - 1790. Burke's 'Reflections on the Revolution in France.'
 - 1791. Boswell's 'Life of Dr Johnson.'
- 1793. Hazlitt enters the Unitarian College at Hackney.
 - 1793. Execution of Louis XVI.
War declared by the French Republic.
 - 1795. Birth of Keats and Carlyle.
 - 1796. Death of Burns.
 - 1797. Death of Burke.
- 1798. Hazlitt meets Coleridge and Wordsworth.
 - 1798. The 'Lyrical Ballads.'
The Irish Rebellion.
Battle of the Nile.
 - 1799. Campbell's 'Pleasures of Hope.'
 - 1800. Union of Great Britain and Ireland.
Death of Cowper. Birth of Macaulay.
 - 1801. Southey's 'Thalaba.'
 - 1802. Treaty of Amiens.
The 'Edinburgh Review' founded.

- 1802. Hazlitt goes to Paris to study art.
- 1803. Hazlitt returns from Paris and sets up as a portrait-painter.
 - 1803. War begun again with France.
 - 1804. Napoleon becomes Emperor of the French.
- 1805. 'An Essay on the Principles of Human Action.'
 - 1805. Scott's 'Lay of the Last Minstrel.'
 - Battles of Trafalgar and Austerlitz.
- 1806. 'Free thoughts on Public Affairs, or Advice to a Patriot.'
- 1807. 'An Abridgment of the Light of Nature Pursued.'
 - 'Reply to the Essay on Population by Malthus.'
 - 1807. Lamb's 'Tales from Shakespeare.'
- 1808. 'The Eloquence of the British Senate.' 2 vols.
 Hazlitt marries Miss Sarah Stoddart; settles at Winterslow in Wiltshire.
 - 1808. Scott's 'Marmion.'
 - Lamb's 'Specimens of English Dramatic Poets.'
 - The 'Quarterly Review' founded.
 - Peninsular War begins.
 - 1809. Birth of Tennyson, Darwin, and Gladstone.
- 1810. 'A New and Improved Grammar of the English Tongue.'
 - 1810. Scott's 'Lady of the Lake.' Crabbe's 'Borough.'
 - Southey's 'Curse of Kehama.'
 - 1811. Jane Austen's 'Sense and Sensibility.'
 - Birth of Thackeray.
- 1812. Hazlitt removes to London; lectures on the 'Rise and Progress of Modern Philosophy'; parliamentary reporter to the 'Morning Chronicle' (1812-1814).
 - 1812. Byron's 'Childe Harold' (I. and II.)
 - Birth of Browning and Dickens.
 - 1813. Southey becomes Poet Laureate.
- 1814. Hazlitt becomes theatrical critic on the 'Morning Chronicle'; begins to contribute to the 'Edinburgh Review' (1814-1830) and the 'Examiner.'
 - 1814. Scott's 'Waverley.' Wordsworth's 'Excursion.'
 - 1815. Battle of Waterloo.
- 1816. 'Memoirs of the late Thomas Holcroft.'
- 1817. 'The Round Table: a Collection of Essays on Literature, Men, and Manners,' 2 vols.
 - 'Characters of Shakespeare's Plays.'
 - 1817. 'Blackwood's Magazine' founded.
 - Coleridge's 'Biographia Literaria.'

1818. 'Lectures on the English Poets.'
 'A View of the English Stage.'
 1818. Keats's 'Endymion.'
1819. 'Lectures on the English Comic Writers.'
 'Letter to William Gifford, Esq.'
 'Political Essays, with Sketches of Public Characters.'
 1819. Byron's 'Don Juan' (I. and II.)
1820. 'Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth.'
 1820. Accession of George IV.
- 1821 'Table-Talk, or Original Essays' (2 vols.), 1821, 1822.
 1821. De Quincey's 'Confessions of an Opium-Eater.'
 Death of Napoleon.
1822. Hazlitt divorced from his wife under Scots law; contributes to the 'New Monthly Magazine' (1822-1830) and to the 'Liberal' (1822, 1823).
1823. 'Liber Amoris, or the New Pygmalion.'
 'Characteristics, in the Manner of Rochefoucauld's Maxims.'
 1823. Lamb's 'Essays of Elia.'
1824. 'Select British Poets' (suppressed: a new edition, entitled 'Select Poets of Great Britain,' published in 1825).
 'Sketches of the Principal Art Galleries in England.'
 Article on the 'Fine Arts' in the 'Encyclopædia Britannica.'
 Marries Mrs Bridgwater; travels with her on the Continent.
 1824. Carlyle's translation of 'Wilhelm Meister.'
 Death of Byron.
1825. 'The Spirit of the Age, or Contemporary Portraits.'
 Separates from his wife.
1826. 'The Plain Speaker: Opinions on Books, Men, and Things.'
 'Notes of a Journey through France and Italy.'
 Contributes to the 'New Monthly Magazine' "Boswell Redivivus" (1826, 1827), published in 1830 under the title, 'Conversations of James Northcote, Esq., R.A.'
1827. Begins his 'Life of Napoleon Buonaparte.'
 1827. Scott's 'Life of Napoleon.'
 Tennyson, 'Poems by Two Brothers.'
1828. 'The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte' (vols. i. and ii.)
1830. 'The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte' (vols. iii. and iv.)
 'The Life of Titian; with Anecdotes of the Distinguished Persons of his Time, by James Northcote, Esq., R.A.' (including a translation of Ticozzi's 'Life of Titian' by Hazlitt and his son), 2 vols.
 Dies in London (18th September).

1836. 'Literary Remains of the late William Hazlitt; with a Notice of his Life, by his Son, and Thoughts on his Genius and Writings, by E. L. Bulwer and Mr Serjeant Talfourd,' 2 vols.
1839. 'Sketches and Essays. By William Hazlitt. Now first collected by his Son.'
1850. 'Winterslow; Essays and Characters written there. By William Hazlitt. Collected by his Son.'

H A Z L I T T.

ESSAYS ON POETRY.



I.

ON CRITICISM.

CRITICISM is an art that undergoes a great variety of changes, and aims at different objects at different times.

At first, it is generally satisfied to give an opinion whether a work is good or bad, and to quote a passage or two in support of this opinion; afterwards, it is bound to assign the reasons of its decision and to analyse supposed beauties or defects with microscopic minuteness. A critic does nothing nowadays who does not try to torture the most obvious expression 10 into a thousand meanings, and enter into a circuitous explanation of all that can be urged for or against its being in the best or worst style possible. His object indeed is not to do justice to his author, whom he treats with very little ceremony, but to do himself homage, and to show his acquaintance with all the 16

topics and resources of criticism. If he recurs to the stipulated subject in the end, it is not till after he has exhausted his budget of general knowledge; and he establishes his own claims first in an elaborate inaugural dissertation *de omni scibile et quibusdam aliis*, before he deigns to bring forward the pretensions of the original candidate for praise, who is only the second figure in the piece. We may sometimes see articles of this sort, in which no allusion whatever is
10 made to the work under sentence of death, after the first announcement of the title-page; and I apprehend it would be a clear improvement on this species of nominal criticism to give stated periodical accounts of works that had never appeared at all, which would save the hapless author the mortification of writing, and his reviewer the trouble of reading them. If the real author is made of so little account by the modern critic, he is scarcely more an object of regard to the modern reader; and it must be confessed that after a
20 dozen close-packed pages of subtle metaphysical distinction or solemn didactic declamation, in which the disembodied principles of all arts and sciences float before the imagination in undefined profusion, the eye turns with impatience and indifference to the imperfect embryo specimens of them, and the hopeless attempts to realise this splendid jargon in one poor work by one poor author, which is given up to summary execution with as little justice as pity. “As
30 when a well-graced actor leaves the stage, men’s eyes are idly bent on him that enters next”—so it is here. Whether this state of the press is not a serious abuse and a violent encroachment in the republic of letters is more than I shall pretend to determine. The truth is, that in the quantity of works that issue from the

press, it is utterly impossible they should all be read by all sorts of people. There must be *tasters* for the public, who must have a discretionary power vested in them, for which it is difficult to make them properly accountable. Authors, in proportion to their numbers, become not formidable, but despicable. They would not be heard of or severed from the crowd without the critic's aid, and all complaints of ill-treatment are vain. He considers them as pensioners on his bounty for any pittance of praise, and in general sets them up as butts for his wit and spleen, or uses them as a stalking-horse to convey his own favourite notions and opinions, which he can do by this means without the possibility of censure or appeal. He looks upon his literary *protégé* (much as Peter Pounce looked upon Parson Adams) as a kind of humble companion or unnecessary interloper in the vehicle of fame, whom he has taken up purely to oblige him, and whom he may treat with neglect or insult, or set down in the common footpath whenever it suits his humour or convenience. He naturally grows arbitrary with the exercise of power. He by degrees wants to have a clear stage to himself, and would be thought to have purchased a monopoly of wit, learning, and wisdom—

“ Assumes the rod, affects the God,
And seems to shake the spheres.”

Besides, something of this overbearing manner goes a great way with the public. They cannot exactly tell whether you are right or wrong; and if you state your difficulties or pay much deference to the sentiments of others, they will think you a very silly fellow or a mere pretender. A sweeping, unqualified assertion

- ends all controversy, and sets opinion at rest. A sharp, sententious, cavalier, dogmatical tone is therefore necessary, even in self-defence, to the office of a reviewer. If you do not deliver your oracles without hesitation, how are the world to receive them on trust and without inquiry? People read to have something to talk about, and "to seem to know that which they do not." Consequently, there cannot be too much dialectics and debatable matter, too much
- 10 pomp and paradox, in a review. *To elevate and surprise* is the great rule for producing a dramatic or a critical effect. The more you startle the reader, the more he will be able to startle others with a succession of smart intellectual shocks. The most admired of our Reviews is saturated with this sort of electrical matter, which is regularly played off so as to produce a good deal of astonishment and a strong sensation in the public mind. The intrinsic merits of an author are a question of very subordinate consideration to the
- 20 keeping up the character of the work and supplying the town with a sufficient number of grave or brilliant topics for the consumption of the next three months!

This decided and paramount tone in criticism is the growth of the present century, and was not at all the fashion in that calm peaceable period when the 'Monthly Review' bore "sole sovereign sway and masterdom" over all literary productions. Though nothing can be said against the respectability or use-

30 fulness of that publication during its long and almost exclusive enjoyment of the public favour, yet the style of criticism adopted in it is such as to appear slight and unsatisfactory to a modern reader. The writers,

instead of "outdoing termagant or out-Heroding Herod," were somewhat precise and prudish, gentle almost to a fault, full of candour and modesty,

"And of their port as meek as is a maid!"¹

There was none of that Drawcansir work going on then that there is now; no scalping of authors, no hacking and hewing of their Lives and Opinions, except that they used those of Tristram Shandy, GENT., rather scurvily; which was to be expected. All, however, had a show of courtesy and good manners. 10 The satire was covert and artfully insinuated; the praise was short and sweet. We meet with no oracular theories, no profound analysis of principles, no unsparing exposure of the least discernible deviation from them. It was deemed sufficient to recommend the work in general terms, "This is an agreeable volume," or, "This is a work of great learning and research," to set forth the title and table of contents, and proceed without further preface to some appropriate extracts, for the most part concurring in opinion 20 with the author's text, but now and then interposing an objection to maintain appearances and assert the jurisdiction of the court. This cursory manner of hinting approbation or dissent would make but a lame figure at present. We must have not only an announcement that "this is an agreeable or able

¹ A Mr Rose and the Rev. Dr Kippis were for many years its principal support. Mrs Rose (I have heard my father say) contributed the Monthly Catalogue. There is sometimes a certain tartness and the woman's tongue in it. It is said of Gray's 'Elegy'—"This little poem, however humble its pretensions, is not without elegance or merit." The characters of prophet and critic are not always united.

work," but we must have it explained at full length, and so as to silence all cavillers in what the agreeableness or ability of the work consists: the author must be reduced to a class, all the living or defunct examples of which must be characteristically and pointedly *differenced* from one another; the value of this class of writing must be developed and ascertained in comparison with others; the principles of taste, the elements of our sensations, the structure of the
10 human faculties, all must undergo a strict scrutiny and revision. The modern or metaphysical system of criticism, in short, supposes the question, *Why?* to be repeated at the end of every decision; and the answer gives birth to interminable arguments and discussion. The former laconic mode was well adapted to guide those who merely wanted to be informed of the character and subject of a work in order to read it: the present is more useful to those whose object is less to read the work than to dispute upon its
20 merits, and go into company clad in the whole defensive and offensive armour of criticism.

Neither are we less removed at present from the dry and meagre mode of dissecting the skeletons of works, instead of transfusing their living principles, which prevailed in Dryden's Prefaces,¹ and in the criticisms written on the model of the French School about a century ago. A genuine criticism should, as I take it, reflect the colours, the light and shade, the soul and body of a work: here we have nothing but
30 its superficial plan and elevation, as if a poem were

¹ There are some splendid exceptions to this censure. His comparison between Ovid and Virgil and his character of Shakespeare are masterpieces of their kind.

a piece of formal architecture. We are told something of the plot or fable, of the moral, and of the observance or violation of the three unities of time, place, and action; and perhaps a word or two is added on the dignity of the persons or the baldness of the style: but we no more know, after reading one of these complacent *tirades*, what the essence of the work is, what passion has been touched, or how skilfully, what tone and movement the author's mind imparts to his subject or receives from it, than if we 10 had been reading a homily or a gazette. That is, we are left quite in the dark as to the feelings of pleasure or pain to be derived from the genius of the performance or the manner in which it appeals to the imagination: we know to a nicety how it squares with the threadbare rules of composition, not in the least how it affects the principles of taste. We know everything about the work, and nothing of it. The critic takes good care not to balk the reader's fancy by anticipating the effect which the author has aimed at 20 producing. To be sure, the works so handled were often worthy of their commentators: they had the form of imagination without the life or power; and when any one had gone regularly through the number of acts into which they were divided, the measure in which they were written, or the story on which they were founded, there was little else to be said about them. It is curious to observe the effect which the 'Paradise Lost' had on this class of critics, like throwing a tub to a whale: they could make nothing of it. 30 "It was out of all plumb—not one of the angles at the four corners was a right angle!" They did not seek for, nor would they much relish, the marrow of

poetry it contained. Like polemics in religion, they had discarded the essentials of fine writing for the outward form and points of controversy. They were at issue with Genius and Nature by what route and in what garb they should enter the Temple of the Muses. Accordingly we find that Dryden had no other way of satisfying himself of the pretensions of Milton in the epic style but by translating his anomalous work into rhyme and dramatic dialogue.¹ So

10 there are connoisseurs who give you the subject, the grouping, the perspective, and all the mechanical circumstances of a picture, but never say a word about the expression. The reason is, they see the former, but not the latter. There are persons, however, who cannot employ themselves better than in taking an inventory of works of art (they want a faculty for higher studies), as there are works of art, so called, which seem to have been composed expressly with an eye to such a class of connoisseurs. In them are to

20 be found no recondite nameless beauties thrown away upon the stupid vulgar gaze; no "graces snatched beyond the reach of art"; nothing but what the

¹ We have critics in the present day who cannot tell what to make of the tragic writers of Queen Elizabeth's age (except Shakespeare, who passes by prescriptive right), and are extremely puzzled to reduce the efforts of their "great and irregular" power to the standard of their own slight and showy commonplaces. The truth is they had better give up the attempt to reconcile such contradictions as an artificial taste and natural genius, and repose on the admiration of verses which derive their odour from the scent of rose-leaves inserted between the pages and their polish from the smoothness of the paper on which they are printed. They, and such writers as Dekker and Webster, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ford and Marlowe, move in different orbs of the human intellect, and need never jostle.

merest pretender may note down in good set terms in his commonplace book, just as it is before him. Place one of these half-informed, imperfectly organised spectators before a tall canvas with groups on groups of figures of the size of life, and engaged in a complicated action of which they know the name and all the particulars, and there are no bounds to their burst of involuntary enthusiasm. They mount on the stilts of the subject and ascend the highest heaven of Invention, from whence they see sights 10 and hear revelations which they communicate with all the fervour of plenary explanation to those who may be disposed to attend to their raptures. They float with wings expanded in lofty circles, they stalk over the canvas at large strides, never condescending to pause at anything of less magnitude than a group or a colossal figure. The face forms no part of their collective inquiries; or so that it occupies only a sixth or an eighth proportion of the whole body, all is according to the received rules of composition. Point 20 to a divine portrait of Titian, to an angelic head of Guido, close by—they see and heed it not. What are the “looks commercing with the skies,” the soul speaking in the face, to them? It asks another and an inner sense to comprehend them; but for the trigonometry of painting, nature has constituted them indifferently well. They take a stand on the distinction between portrait and history, and there they are spell-bound. Tell them that there can be no fine history without portraiture, that the painter must 30 proceed from that ground to the one above it, and that a hundred bad heads cannot make one good historical picture, and they will not believe you, though

the thing is obvious to any gross capacity. Their ideas always fly to the circumference, and never fix at the centre. Art must be on a grand scale; according to them, the whole is greater than a part, and the greater necessarily implies the less. The outline is, in this view of the matter, the same thing as the filling-up, and "the limbs and flourishes of a discourse" the substance. Again, the same persons make an absolute distinction, without knowing why, 10 between high and low subjects. Say that you would as soon have Murillo's Two Beggar-Boys at the Dulwich Gallery as almost any picture in the world, that is, that it would be one you would choose out of ten (had you the choice), and they reiterate upon you that surely a low subject cannot be of equal value with a high one. It is in vain that you turn to the picture: they keep to the class. They have eyes, but see not; and upon their principles of refined taste would be just as good judges of the 20 merit of the picture without seeing it as with that supposed advantage. They know what the subject is *from the catalogue!* Yet it is not true, as Lord Byron asserts, that execution is everything, and the class or subject nothing. The highest subjects, equally well executed (which, however, rarely happens), are the best. But the power of execution, the manner of seeing nature, is one thing, and may be so superlative (if you are only able to judge of it) as to countervail every disadvantage of subject. Raphael's storks in 30 the Miraculous Draught of Fishes, exulting in the event, are finer than the head of Christ would have been in almost any other hands. The cant of criticism is on the other side of the question; because

execution depends on various degrees of power in the artist, and a knowledge of it on various degrees of feeling and discrimination in you: but to commence artist or connoisseur in the grand style at once, without any distinction of qualifications whatever, it is only necessary for the first to choose his subject, and for the last to pin his faith on the sublimity of the performance, for both to look down with ineffable contempt on the painters and admirers of subjects of low life. I remember a young Scotsman 10 once trying to prove to me that Mrs Dickens was a superior singer to Miss Stephens, because the former excelled in sacred music and the latter did not. At that rate, that is, if it is the singing sacred music that gives the preference, Miss Stephens would only have to sing sacred music to surpass herself and vie with her pretended rival; for this theory implies that all sacred music is equally good, and therefore better than any other. I grant that Madame Catalani's singing of sacred music is superior to Miss Stephens's 20 ballad-strains, because her singing is better altogether, and an ocean of sound more wonderful than a simple stream of dulcet harmonies. In singing the last verse of "God save the King" not long ago, her voice towered above the whole confused noise of the orchestra, like an eagle piercing the clouds, and poured "such sweet thunder" through the ear as excited equal astonishment and rapture!

Some kinds of criticism are as much too insipid as others are too pragmatical. It is not easy to com- 30
bine point with solidity, spirit with moderation and candour. Many persons see nothing but beauties in a work, others nothing but defects. Those cloy you

with sweets, and are "the very milk of human kindness," flowing on in a stream of luscious panegyrics; these take delight in poisoning the sources of your satisfaction, and putting you out of conceit with nearly every author that comes in their way. The first are frequently actuated by personal friendship, the last by all the virulence of party spirit. Under the latter head would fall what may be termed *political criticism*. The basis of this style of writing is a *caput mortuum*
10 of impotent spite and dulness till it is varnished over with the slime of servility, and thrown into a state of unnatural activity by the venom of the most rancorous bigotry. The eminent professors in this grovelling department are at first merely out of sorts with themselves, and vent their spleen in little interjections and contortions of phrase, cry *Pish* at a lucky hit and *Hem* at a fault, are smart on personal defects, and sneer at "Beauty out of favour and on crutches," are thrown into an ague fit by hearing the name
20 of a rival, start back with horror at any approach to their morbid pretensions like Justice Woodcock with his gouty limbs, rifle the flowers of the Della Cruscan School, and give you in their stead, as models of pleasing pastoral style, 'Verses upon Anna'—which you may see in the notes to the 'Baviad' and 'Mæviad.' All this is like the fable of the "Kitten and the Leaves." But when they get their brass collar on and shake their bells of office, they set up their backs like the Great Cat Rodilardus and pounce upon men and things.
30 Woe to any little heedless reptile of an author that ventures across their path without a safe-conduct from the Board of Control. They snap him up at a mouthful, and sit licking their lips, stroking their

whiskers, and rattling their bells over the imaginary fragments of their devoted prey, to the alarm and astonishment of the whole breed of literary, philosophical, and revolutionary vermin, that were naturalised in this country by a Prince of Orange and an Elector of Hanover a hundred years ago.¹ When one of these pampered, sleek, "demure-looking, spring-nailed, velvet-pawed, green-eyed" critics makes his King and Country parties to this sort of sport literary, you have not much chance of escaping out 10 of his clutches in a whole skin. Treachery becomes a principle with them, and mischief a conscience, that is, a livelihood. They not only *damn* the work in the lump, but vilify and traduce the author, and substitute lying abuse and sheer malignity for sense and satire. To have written a popular work is as much as a man's character is worth, and sometimes his life, if he does not happen to be on the right side of the question. The way in which they set about *stultifying* an adversary is not to accuse you of faults, 20 or to exaggerate those which you may really have, but they deny that you have any merits at all, least of all those that the world have given you credit for; bless themselves from understanding a single sentence in a whole volume; and unless you are ready to subscribe to all their articles of peace will not allow you to be qualified to write your own name. It is not a question of literary discussion but of political proscription. It is a mark of loyalty and patriotism to extend no quarter to those of the opposite party. In 30

¹ The intelligent reader will be pleased to understand that there is here a tacit allusion to Squire Western's significant phrase of *Hanover Rats*.

stead of replying to your arguments, they call you names, put words and opinions into your mouth which you have never uttered, and consider it a species of misprision of treason to admit that a Whig author knows anything of common-sense or English. The only chance of putting a stop to this unfair mode of dealing would perhaps be to make a few reprisals by way of example. The Court party boast some writers who have a reputation to lose, and who would not
10 like to have their names dragged through the kennel of dirty abuse and vulgar obloquy. What silenced the masked battery of 'Blackwood's Magazine' was the implication of the name of Sir Walter Scott in some remarks upon it—an honour of which it seems that extraordinary person was not ambitious: to be "pilloried on infamy's high stage" was a distinction and an amusement to the other gentlemen concerned in that praiseworthy publication. I was complaining not long ago of this prostitution of literary criticism
20 as peculiar to our own times, when I was told that it was just as bad in the time of Pope and Dryden, and indeed worse, inasmuch as we have no Popes or Drydens now on the obnoxious side to be nicknamed, metamorphosed into scarecrows, and impaled alive by bigots and dunces. I shall not pretend to say how far this remark may be true. The English (it must be owned) are rather a foul-mouthed nation.

Besides temporary or accidental biases of this kind, there seem to be sects and parties in taste and criticism (with a set of appropriate watchwords) coeval
30 with the arts of composition, and that will last as long as the difference with which men's minds are originally constituted. There are some who are all

for the elegance of an author's style, and some who are equally delighted with simplicity. The last refer you to Swift as a model of English prose, thinking all other writers sophisticated and naught; the former prefer the more ornamented and sparkling periods of Junius or Gibbon. It is to no purpose to think of bringing about an understanding between these opposite factions. It is a natural difference of temperament and constitution of mind. The one will never relish the antithetical point and perpetual glitter of 10 the artificial prose style; as the plain unperverted English idiom will always appear trite and insipid to the others. A toleration, not a uniformity of opinion, is as much as can be expected in this case; and both sides may acknowledge, without imputation on their taste or consistency, that these different writers excelled each in their way. I might remark here that the epithet *elegant* is very sparingly used in modern criticism. It has probably gone out of fashion with the appearance of the Lake School, who, I apprehend, 20 have no such phrase in their vocabulary. Mr Rogers was, I think, almost the last poet to whom it was applied as a characteristic compliment. At present it would be considered as a sort of diminutive of the title of poet, like the terms *pretty* or *fanciful*, and is banished from the *haut ton* of letters. It may perhaps come into request at some future period. Again, the dispute between the admirers of Homer and Virgil has never been settled, and never will: for there will always be minds to whom the excellences of Virgil 30 will be more congenial, and therefore more objects of admiration, than those of Homer, and *vice versâ*. Both are right in preferring what suits them best—the

delicacy and selectness of the one, or the fulness and majestic flow of the other. There is the same difference in their tastes that there was in the genius of their two favourites. Neither can the disagreement between the French and English school of tragedy ever be reconciled till the French become English, or the English French.¹ Both are right in what they admire ; both are wrong in condemning the others for what they admire. We see the defects of Racine ;
10 they see the faults of Shakespeare probably in an exaggerated point of view. But we may be sure of this, that when we see nothing but grossness and barbarism, or insipidity and verbiage, in a writer that is the God of a nation's idolatry, it is we and not they who want true taste and feeling. The controversy about Pope and the opposite school in our own poetry comes to much the same thing. Pope's correctness, smoothness, &c., are very good things and much to be commended in him. But it is not to
20 be expected, or even desired, that others should have these qualities in the same paramount degree, to the exclusion of everything else. If you like correctness and smoothness of all things in the world, there they are for you in Pope. If you like other things better, such as strength and sublimity, you know where to go for them. Why trouble Pope or any other author for what they have not, and do not profess to give ? Those who seem to imply that Pope possessed, besides his own peculiar exquisite merits, all that is to be
30 found in Shakespeare or Milton, are, I should hardly think, in good earnest. But I do not therefore see

¹ Of the two the latter alternative is more likely to happen. We abuse and imitate them. They laugh at but do not imitate us.

that, because this was not the case, Pope was no poet. We cannot by a little verbal sophistry confound the qualities of different minds, nor force opposite excellences into a union by all the intolerance in the world. We may pull Pope in pieces as long as we please for not being Shakespeare or Milton, as we may carp at them for not being Pope; but this will not make a poet equal to all three. If we have a taste for some one precise style or manner, we may keep it to ourselves and let others have theirs. If we are more catholic in our notions and want variety of excellence and beauty, it is spread abroad for us to profusion in the variety of books and in the several growth of men's minds, fettered by no capricious or arbitrary rules. Those who would proscribe whatever falls short of a given standard of imaginary perfection do so not from a higher capacity of taste or range of intellect than others, but to destroy, to "crib and cabin in" all enjoyments and opinions but their own. 10 20

We find people of a decided and original, and others of a more general and versatile, taste. I have sometimes thought that the most acute and original-minded men made bad critics. They see everything too much through a particular medium. What does not fall in with their own bias and mode of composition strikes them as commonplace and factitious. What does not come into the direct line of their vision they regard idly, with vacant, "lack-lustre eye." The extreme force of their original impressions compared with the feebleness of those they receive at second hand from others, oversets the balance and just proportion of their minds. Men who have fewer 30

native resources, and are obliged to apply oftener to the general stock, acquire by habit a greater aptitude in appreciating what they owe to others. Their taste is not made a sacrifice to their egotism and vanity, and they enrich the soil of their minds with continual accessions of borrowed strength and beauty. I might take this opportunity of observing that the person of the most refined and least contracted taste I ever knew was the late Joseph Fawcett, the friend of my youth.

10 He was almost the first literary acquaintance I ever made, and I think the most candid and unsophisticated. He had a masterly perception of all style and of every kind and degree of excellence, sublime or beautiful, from Milton's 'Paradise Lost' to Shennstone's 'Pastoral Ballad,' from Butler's 'Analogy' down to 'Humphrey Clinker.' If you had a favourite author, he had read him too, and knew all the best morsels, the subtle *traits*, the capital touches. "Do you like Sterne?" "Yes, to be sure," he would say; "I should

20 deserve to be hanged if I didn't!" His repeating some parts of 'Comus' with his fine, deep, mellow-toned voice, particularly the lines, "I have oft heard my mother Circe with the Sirens three," &c., and the enthusiastic comments he made afterwards, were a feast to the ear and to the soul. He read the poetry of Milton with the same fervour and spirit of devotion that I have since heard others read their own. "That is the most delicious feeling of all," I have heard him exclaim, "to like what is excellent, no matter whose

30 it is." In this respect he practised what he preached. He was incapable of harbouring a sinister motive, and judged only from what he felt. There was no flaw nor mist in the clear mirror of his mind. He was

as open to impressions as he was strenuous in maintaining them. He did not care a rush whether a writer was old or new, in prose or in verse. "What he wanted," he said, "was something to make him think." Most men's minds are to me like musical instruments out of tune. Touch a particular key, and it jars and makes harsh discord with your own. They like Gil Blas, but can see nothing to laugh at in Don Quixote: they adore Richardson, but are disgusted with Fielding. Fawcett had a taste accommodated to all these. He was not exceptionous. He gave a cordial welcome to all sorts, provided they were the best in their kind. He was not fond of counterfeits or duplicates. His own style was laboured and artificial to a fault, while his character was frank and ingenuous in the extreme. He was not the only individual whom I have known to counteract their natural disposition in coming before the public, and, by avoiding what they perhaps thought an inherent infirmity, debar themselves of their real strength and advantages. A heartier friend or honester critic I never coped withal. He has made me feel (by contrast) the want of genuine sincerity and generous sentiment in some that I have listened to since, and convinced me (if practical proof were wanting) of the truth of that text of Scripture—"That had I all knowledge and could speak with the tongues of angels, yet without charity I were nothing!" I would rather be a man of disinterested taste and liberal feeling, to see and acknowledge truth and beauty wherever I found it, than a man of greater and more original genius, to hate, envy, and deny all excellence but my own—but that poor scanty

pittance of it (compared with the whole) which I had myself produced!

There is another race of critics who might be designated as the Occult School—*verè adepts*. They discern no beauties but what are concealed from superficial eyes, and overlook all that are obvious to the vulgar part of mankind. Their art is the transmutation of styles. By happy alchemy of mind they convert dross into gold—and gold into tinsel. They see farther into
10 a millstone than most others. If an author is utterly unreadable, they can read him for ever; his intricacies are their delight, his mysteries are their study. They prefer Sir Thomas Browne to the ‘Rambler’ by Dr Johnson, and Burton’s ‘Anatomy of Melancholy’ to all the writers of the Georgian Age. They judge of works of genius as misers do of hid treasure—it is of no value unless they have it all to themselves. They will no more share a book than a mistress with a friend. If they suspected their favourite volumes
20 of delighting any eyes but their own, they would immediately discard them from the list. Theirs are superannuated beauties that every one else has left off intriguing with, bedridden hags, a “stud of nightmares.” This is not envy or affectation, but a natural proneness to singularity, a love of what is odd and out of the way. They must come at their pleasures with difficulty, and support admiration by an uneasy sense of ridicule and opposition. They despise those qualities in a work which are cheap and obvious. They
30 like a monopoly of taste, and are shocked at the prostitution of intellect implied in popular productions. In like manner they would choose a friend or recommend a mistress for gross defects, and tolerate

the sweetness of an actress's voice only for the ugliness of her face. Pure pleasures are in their judgment cloying and insipid—

“An ounce of sour is worth a pound of sweet !”

Nothing goes down with them but what is *caviare* to the multitude. They are eaters of olives and readers of black-letter. Yet they smack of genius, and would be worth any money were it only for the rarity of the thing !

The last sort I shall mention are *verbal critics*—mere word-catchers, fellows that pick out a word in 10 a sentence and a sentence in a volume and tell you it is wrong.¹ These erudite persons constantly find out by anticipation that you are deficient in the smallest things—that you cannot spell certain words or join the nominative case and the verb together, because to do this is the height of their own ambition, and of course they must set you down lower than their opinion of themselves. They degrade by reducing you to their own standard of merit; for the qualifications they deny you, or the faults they object, are so very in- 20 significant, that to prove yourself possessed of the one or free from the other is to make yourself doubly ridiculous. Littleness is their element, and they give a character of meanness to whatever they touch. They creep, buzz, and fly-blow. It is much easier to crush than to catch these troublesome insects; and when they are in your power your self-respect spares them. The race is almost extinct; one or two of them are sometimes seen crawling over the pages of the ‘Quarterly Review’!

30

¹ The title of *Ultra-Crepidarian critics* has been given to a variety of this species.

II.

ON POETRY IN GENERAL.

THE best general notion which I can give of poetry is that it is the natural impression of any object or event, by its vividness exciting an involuntary movement of imagination and passion, and producing, by sympathy, a certain modulation of the voice or sounds expressing it.

In treating of poetry, I shall speak first of the subject-matter of it, next of the forms of expression to which it gives birth, and afterwards of its connection
10 with harmony of sound.

Poetry is the language of the imagination and the passions. It relates to whatever gives immediate pleasure or pain to the human mind. It comes home to the bosoms and businesses of men ; for nothing but what so comes home to them in the most general and intelligible shape can be a subject for poetry. Poetry is the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself. He who has a contempt for poetry cannot have much respect for himself or for anything
20 else. It is not a mere frivolous accomplishment (as some persons have been led to imagine), the trifling amusement of a few idle readers or leisure hours—it has been the study and delight of mankind in all ages.

Many people suppose that poetry is something to be found only in books, contained in lines of ten syllables with like endings ; but wherever there is a sense of beauty, or power, or harmony, as in the motion of a wave of the sea, in the growth of a flower that "spreads its sweet leaves to the air and dedicates its beauty to the sun,"—*there* is poetry in its birth. If history is a grave study, poetry may be said to be a graver : its materials lie deeper and are spread wider. History treats, for the most part, of the cumbrous and 10 unwieldy masses of things, the empty cases in which the affairs of the world are packed, under the heads of intrigue or war, in different states, and from century to century ; but there is no thought or feeling that can have entered into the mind of man which he would be eager to communicate to others, or which they would listen to with delight, that is not a fit subject for poetry. It is not a branch of authorship ; it is "the stuff of which our life is made." The rest is "mere oblivion," a dead letter ; for all that is worth 20 remembering in life is the poetry of it. Fear is poetry, hope is poetry, love is poetry, hatred is poetry ; contempt, jealousy, remorse, admiration, wonder, pity, despair, or madness, are all poetry. Poetry is that fine particle within us that expands, rarefies, refines, raises our whole being : without it "man's life is poor as beast's." Man is a poetical animal ; and those of us who do not study the principles of poetry act upon them all our lives like Molière's "Bourgeois Gentilhomme," who had always spoken prose without knowing it. The 30 child is a poet, in fact, when he first plays at hide-and-seek, or repeats the story of Jack the Giant-killer ; the shepherd boy is a poet when he first crowns his

mistress with a garland of flowers ; the countryman, when he stops to look at the rainbow ; the city apprentice, when he gazes after the Lord Mayor's show ; the miser, when he hugs his gold ; the courtier, who builds his hopes upon a smile ; the savage, who paints his idol with blood ; the slave, who worships a tyrant, or the tyrant, who fancies himself a god ; the vain, the ambitious, the proud, the cholerick man, the hero and the coward, the beggar and the king, the rich and
 10 the poor, the young and the old, all live in a world of their own making ; and the poet does no more than describe what all the others think and act. If his art is folly and madness, it is folly and madness at second hand. "There is warrant for it." Poets alone have not "such seething brains, such shaping fantasies, that apprehend more than cool reason" can.

20 "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,
 Are of imagination all compact.
 One sees more devils than vast hell can hold ;
 That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
 Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
 The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
 Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven ;
 And as imagination bodies forth
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
 Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
 A local habitation and a name.
 Such tricks hath strong imagination."

If poetry is a dream, the business of life is much
 30 the same. If it is a fiction, made up of what we wish things to be, and fancy that they are because we wish them so, there is no other nor better reality. Ariosto has described the loves of Angelica and Medoro ; but

was not Medoro, who carved the name of his mistress on the barks of trees, as much enamoured of her charms as he? Homer has celebrated the anger of Achilles; but was not the hero as mad as the poet? Plato banished the poets from his Commonwealth lest their descriptions of the natural man should spoil his mathematical man, who was to be without passions and affections, who was neither to laugh nor weep, to feel sorrow nor anger, to be cast down nor elated by anything. This was a chimera, however, which never existed but in the brain of the inventor; and Homer's poetical world has outlived Plato's philosophical Republic. 10

Poetry, then, is an imitation of nature, but the imagination and the passions are a part of man's nature. We shape things according to our wishes and fancies without poetry; but poetry is the most emphatical language that can be found for those creations of the mind which "ecstasy is very cunning in." Neither a mere description of natural objects nor a mere delineation of natural feelings, however distinct or forcible, constitutes the ultimate end and aim of poetry without the heightenings of the imagination. The light of poetry is not only a direct but also a reflected light, that, while it shows us the object, throws a sparkling radiance on all around it: the flame of the passions, communicated to the imagination, reveals to us as with a flash of lightning the inmost recesses of thought, and penetrates our whole being. Poetry represents forms chiefly as they suggest other forms; feelings, as they suggest forms or other feelings. Poetry puts a spirit of life and motion into 30

the universe. It describes the flowing, not the fixed. It does not define the limits of sense nor analyse the distinctions of the understanding, but signifies the excess of the imagination beyond the actual or ordinary impression of any object or feeling. The poetical impression of any object is that uneasy, exquisite sense of beauty or power that cannot be contained within itself; that is impatient of all limit; that (as flame bends to flame) strives to link itself to some
10 other image of kindred beauty or grandeur, to enshrine itself, as it were, in the highest forms of fancy, and to relieve the aching sense of pleasure by expressing it in the boldest manner, and by the most striking examples of the same quality in other instances. Poetry, according to Lord Bacon, for this reason, "has something divine in it, because it raises the mind and hurries it into sublimity by conforming the shows of things to the desires of the soul, instead of subjecting the soul to external things as reason and
20 history do." It is strictly the language of the imagination; and the imagination is that faculty which represents objects, not as they are in themselves, but as they are moulded, by other thoughts and feelings, into an infinite variety of shapes and combinations of power. This language is not the less true to nature because it is false in point of fact; but so much the more true and natural if it conveys the impression which the object under the influence of passion makes on the mind. Let an object, for instance, be pre-
30 sented to the senses in a state of agitation or fear, and the imagination will distort or magnify the object, and convert it into the likeness of whatever is most proper to encourage the fear. "Our eyes are made

the fools" of our other faculties. This is the universal law of the imagination—

"That if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy :
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear !"

When Iachimo says of Imogen—

"The flame o' the taper
Bows toward her, and would under-peep her lids
To see the enclosed lights"—

10

this passionate interpretation of the motion of the flame to accord with the speaker's own feelings is true poetry. The lover, equally with the poet, speaks of the auburn tresses of his mistress as locks of shining gold, because the least tinge of yellow in the hair has, from novelty and a sense of personal beauty, a more lustrous effect to the imagination than the purest gold. We compare a man of gigantic stature to a tower ; not that he is anything like so large, but because the excess of his size beyond what we are accustomed to 20 expect, or the usual size of things of the same class, produces by contrast a greater feeling of magnitude and ponderous strength than another object of ten times the same dimensions. The intensity of the feeling makes up for the disproportion of the objects. Things are equal to the imagination which have the power of affecting the mind with an equal degree of terror, admiration, delight, or love. When Lear calls upon the heavens to avenge his cause, "for they are old like him," there is nothing extravagant or impious 30 in this sublime identification of his age with theirs ;

for there is no other image which could do justice to the agonising sense of his wrongs and his despair !

Poetry is the high-wrought enthusiasm of fancy and feeling. As in describing natural objects it impregnates sensible impressions with the forms of fancy, so it describes the feelings of pleasure or pain by blending them with the strongest movements of passion and the most striking forms of nature. Tragic
10 poetry, which is the most impassioned species of it, strives to carry on the feeling to the utmost point of sublimity or pathos by all the force of comparison or contrast ; loses the sense of present suffering in the imaginary exaggeration of it ; exhausts the terror or pity by an unlimited indulgence of it ; grapples with impossibilities in its desperate impatience of restraint ; throws us back upon the past, forward into the future ; brings every moment of our being or object of nature in startling review before us ; and, in the rapid whirl
20 of events, lifts us from the depths of woe to the highest contemplations on human life. When Lear says of Edgar, " Nothing but his unkind daughters could have brought him to this," what a bewildered amazement, what a wrench of the imagination, that cannot be brought to conceive of any other cause of misery than that which has bowed it down, and absorbs all other sorrow in its own ! His sorrow, like a flood, supplies the sources of all other sorrow. Again, when he exclaims in the mad scene, " The little dogs and
30 all, Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me !" it is passion lending occasion to imagination to make every creature in league against him, conjuring up ingratitude and insult in their least looked-

for and most galling shapes, searching every thread and fibre of his heart, and finding out the last remaining image of respect or attachment in the bottom of his breast only to torture and kill it! In like manner the "So I am" of Cordelia gushes from her heart like a torrent of tears, relieving it of a weight of love and of supposed ingratitude which had pressed upon it for years. What a fine return of the passion upon itself is that in Othello—with what a mingled agony of regret and despair he clings to the last traces 10 of departed happiness—when he exclaims—

"Oh, now, for ever
Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content!
Farewell the plumed troop and the big wars
That make ambition virtue! Oh, farewell!
Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
And, O you mortal engines, whose rude throats
The immortal Jove's dread clamours counterfeit,
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone!"

20

How his passion lashes itself up and swells and rages like a tide in its sounding course, when, in answer to the doubts expressed of his returning love, he says—

"Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic sea,
Whose icy current and compulsive course
Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont,
Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up."

30

The climax of his expostulation afterwards with Desdemona is at that line—

“ But there, where I have garner'd up my heart, . . .
To be discarded thence ! ”

One mode in which the dramatic exhibition of passion excites our sympathy without raising our disgust is that, in proportion as it sharpens the edge of calamity and disappointment, it strengthens the desire of good. It enhances our consciousness of the blessing by making us sensible of the magnitude of the loss. The storm of passion lays bare and shows us the rich depths of the human soul: the whole of our existence, the sum total of our passions and pursuits, of that which we desire and that which we dread, is brought before us by contrast; the action and reaction are equal; the keenness of immediate suffering only gives us a more intense aspiration after, and a more intimate participation with, the antagonist world of good; makes us drink deeper of the cup of human life; tugs at the heart-strings; loosens the pressure about them; and calls the springs of thought and feeling into play with tenfold force.

Impassioned poetry is an emanation of the moral and intellectual part of our nature as well as of the sensitive—of the desire to know, the will to act, and the power to feel,—and ought to appeal to these different parts of our constitution in order to be perfect. The domestic or prose tragedy, which is thought to be the most natural, is in this sense the least so, because it appeals almost exclusively to one of these faculties, our sensibility. The tragedies of Moore and Lillo, for this reason, however affecting

at the time, oppress and lie like a dead weight upon the mind, a load of misery which it is unable to throw off: the tragedy of Shakespeare, which is true poetry, stirs our inmost affection, abstracts evil from itself by combining it with all the forms of imagination and with the deepest workings of the heart, and rouses the whole man within us.

The pleasure, however, derived from tragic poetry is not anything peculiar to it as poetry, as a fictitious and fanciful thing. It is not an anomaly of the imagination. It has its source and groundwork in the common love of strong excitement. As Mr Burke observes, people flock to see a tragedy; but if there were a public execution in the next street, the theatre would very soon be empty. It is not then the difference between fiction and reality that solves the difficulty. Children are satisfied with the stories of ghosts and witches in plain prose; nor do the hawkers of full, true, and particular accounts of murders and executions about the streets find it necessary to have them turned into penny ballads before they can dispose of these interesting and authentic documents. The grave politician drives a thriving trade of abuse and calumnies poured out against those whom he makes his enemies for no other end than that he may live by them. The popular preacher makes less frequent mention of heaven than of hell. Oaths and nicknames are only a more vulgar sort of poetry or rhetoric. We are as fond of indulging our violent passions as of reading a description of those of others. We are as prone to make a torment of our fears as to luxuriate in our hopes of good. If it be asked why we do so, the best answer will be, Because

we cannot help it. The sense of power is as strong a principle in the mind as the love of pleasure. Objects of terror and pity exercise the same despotic control over it as those of love or beauty. It is as natural to hate as to love, to despise as to admire, to express our hatred or contempt as our love or admiration.

“ Masterless passion sways us to the mood
Of what it likes or loathes.”

- 10 Not that we like what we loathe, but we like to indulge our hatred and scorn of it, to dwell upon it, to exasperate our idea of it by every refinement of ingenuity and extravagance of illustration, to make it a bugbear to ourselves, to point it out to others in all the splendour of deformity, to embody it to the senses, to stigmatise it by name, to grapple with it in thought, in action, to sharpen our intellect, to arm our will against it, to know the worst we have to contend with, and to contend with it to the utmost.
- 20 Poetry is only the highest eloquence of passion, the most vivid form of expression that can be given to our conception of anything, whether pleasurable or painful, mean or dignified, delightful or distressing. It is the perfect coincidence of the image and the words with the feeling we have, and of which we cannot get rid in any other way, that gives an instant “satisfaction to the thought.” This is equally the origin of wit and fancy, of comedy and tragedy, of the sublime and pathetic. When Pope says of the
- 30 Lord Mayor’s show—

“ Now night descending, the proud scene was o’er,
But lived in Settle’s numbers one day more ;”

when Collins makes Danger, with "limbs of giant mould,"

"Throw him on the ridgy steep
Of some loose hanging rock to sleep ;"

when Lear calls out in extreme anguish—

"Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child
Than the sea-monster !"

—the passion of contempt in the one case, of terror in the other, and of indignation in the last, is perfectly 10 satisfied. We see the thing ourselves, and show it to others as we feel it to exist, and as, in spite of ourselves, we are compelled to think of it. The imagination, by thus embodying and turning them to shape, gives an obvious relief to the indistinct and importunate cravings of the will. We do not wish the thing to be so ; but we wish it to appear such as it is. For knowledge is conscious power ; and the mind is no longer, in this case, the dupe, though it may be the victim, of vice or folly. 20

Poetry is, in all its shapes, the language of the imagination and the passions of fancy and will. Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the outcry, which has been sometimes raised by frigid and pedantic critics, for reducing the language of poetry to the standard of common-sense and reason ; for the end and use of poetry, both at the first and now, was and is "to hold the mirror up to nature," seen through the medium of passion and imagination, not divested of that medium by means of literal truth or 30 abstract reason. The painter of history might as well be required to represent the face of a person

who has just trod upon a serpent with the still-life expression of a common portrait, as the poet to describe the most striking and vivid impressions which things can be supposed to make upon the mind in the language of common conversation. Let who will strip nature of the colours and the shapes of fancy, the poet is not bound to do so; the impressions of common-sense and strong imagination—that is, of passion and indifference—cannot be the same, and
10 they must have a separate language to do justice to either. Objects must strike differently upon the mind, independently of what they are in themselves, as long as we have a different interest in them, as we see them in a different point of view, nearer or at a greater distance (morally or physically speaking) from novelty, from old acquaintance, from our ignorance of them, from our fear of their consequences, from contrast, from unexpected likeness. We can no more
20 take away the faculty of the imagination than we can see all objects without light or shade. Some things must dazzle us by their preternatural light; others must hold us in suspense, and tempt our curiosity to explore their obscurity. Those who would dispel these various illusions to give us their drab-coloured creation in their stead are not very wise. Let the naturalist, if he will, catch the glow-worm, carry it home with him in a box, and find it next morning
30 nothing but a little grey worm; let the poet or the lover of poetry visit it at evening, when beneath the scented hawthorn and the crescent moon it has built itself a palace of emerald light. This is also one part of nature, one appearance which the glow-worm presents, and that not the least interesting; so poetry

is one part of the history of the human mind, though it is neither science nor philosophy. It cannot be concealed, however, that the progress of knowledge and refinement has a tendency to circumscribe the limits of the imagination, and to clip the wings of poetry. The province of the imagination is principally visionary, the unknown and undefined: the understanding restores things to their natural boundaries and strips them of their fanciful pretensions. Hence the history of religious and poetical enthusiasm is 10 much the same; and both have received a sensible shock from the progress of experimental philosophy. It is the undefined and uncommon that gives birth and scope to the imagination; we can only fancy what we do not know. As in looking into the mazes of a tangled wood we fill them with what shapes we please—with ravenous beasts, with caverns vast, and drear enchantments—so in our ignorance of the world about us we make gods or devils of the first objects we see, and set no bounds to the wilful suggestions 20 of our hopes and fears.

“ And visions, as poetic eyes avow,
Hang on each leaf, and cling to every bough.”

There can never be another Jacob's Dream. Since that time the heavens have gone farther off and grown astronomical. They have become averse to the imagination; nor will they return to us on the squares of the distances, or on Doctor Chalmers's 'Discourses.' Rembrandt's picture brings the matter nearer to us. It is not only the progress of mechanical 30 knowledge, but the necessary advances of civilisation, that are unfavourable to the spirit of poetry. We

not only stand in less awe of the preternatural world, but we can calculate more surely and look with more indifference upon the regular routine of this. The heroes of the fabulous ages rid the world of monsters and giants. At present we are less exposed to the vicissitudes of good or evil, to the incursions of wild beasts or "bandit fierce," or to the unmitigated fury of the elements. The time has been that "our fell
10 life were in it." But the police spoils all; and we now hardly so much as dream of a midnight murder. 'Macbeth' is only tolerated in this country for the sake of the music; and in the United States of America, where the philosophical principles of government are carried still further in theory and practice, we find that the 'Beggars' Opera' is hooted from the stage. Society, by degrees, is constructed into a machine that carries us safely and insipidly from one end of life to the other in a very comfortable prose style.

20 "Obscurity her curtain round them drew,
 And siren Sloth a dull quietus sung."

The remarks which have been here made would in some measure lead to a solution of the question of the comparative merits of painting and poetry. I do not mean to give any preference, but it should seem that the argument, which has been sometimes set up, that painting must affect the imagination more strongly because it represents the image more distinctly, is not well founded. We may assume, without much
30 temerity, that poetry is more poetical than painting. When artists or connoisseurs talk on stilts about the poetry of painting, they show that they know little

about poetry and have little love for the art. Painting gives the object itself ; poetry, what it implies. Painting embodies what a thing contains in itself ; poetry suggests what exists out of it, in any manner connected with it. But this last is the proper province of the imagination. Again, as it relates to passion, painting gives the event, poetry the progress of events ; but it is during the progress, in the interval of expectation and suspense, while our hopes and fears are strained to the highest pitch of breathless agony, 10 that the pinch of the interest lies.

“ Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma or a hideous dream.
The Genius and the mortal instruments
Are then in council ; and the state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection.”

But by the time that the picture is painted, all is over. Faces are the best part of a picture ; but even 20 faces are not what we chiefly remember in what interests us most. But it may be asked then, Is there anything better than Claude Lorraine's landscapes, than Titian's portraits, than Raphael's cartoons, or the Greek statues ? Of the two first I shall say nothing, as they are evidently picturesque rather than imaginative. Raphael's cartoons are certainly the finest comments that ever were made on the Scriptures. Would their effect be the same if we were not acquainted with the text ? But the New Testament 30 existed before the cartoons. There is one subject of which there is no cartoon : Christ washing the feet of the disciples the night before His death. But

that chapter does not need a commentary! It is for want of some such resting-place for the imagination that the Greek statues are little else than specious forms. They are marble to the touch and to the heart. They have not an informing principle within them. In their faultless excellence they appear sufficient to themselves. By their beauty they are raised above the frailties of passion or suffering. By their beauty they are deified. But they are not objects
10 of religious faith to us, and their forms are a reproach to common humanity. They seem to have no sympathy with us, and not to want our admiration.

Poetry, in its matter and form, is natural imagery or feeling combined with passion and fancy. In its mode of conveyance, it combines the ordinary use of language with musical expression. There is a question of long standing in what the essence of poetry consists; or what it is that determines why one set of ideas should be expressed in prose, another
20 in verse. Milton has told us his idea of poetry in a single line—

“Thoughts that voluntary move
Harmonious numbers.”

As there are certain sounds that excite certain movements, and the song and dance go together, so there are no doubt certain thoughts that lead to certain tones of voice or modulations of sound, and change “the words of Mercury into the songs of Apollo.” There is a striking instance of this adaptation of the movement of sound and rhythm to the
30 subject in Spenser’s description of the Satyrs accompanying Una to the cave of Sylvanus—

"So from the ground she fearless doth arise,
 And walketh forth without suspect of crime.
 They, all as glad as birds of joyous prime,
 Thence lead her forth, about her dancing round,
 Shouting and singing all a shepherd's rhyme ;
 And with green branches strewing all the ground,
 Do worship her as queen with olive garland crowned.

And all the way their merry pipes they sound,
 That all the woods with doubled echo ring ;
 And with their horned feet do wear the ground,
 Leaping like wanton kids in pleasant spring.
 So towards old Sylvanus they her bring,
 Who, with the noise awaked, cometh out."

10

On the contrary, there is nothing either musical or natural in the ordinary construction of language. It is a thing altogether arbitrary and conventional. Neither in the sounds themselves, which are the voluntary signs of certain ideas, nor in their grammatical arrangements in common speech, is there any principle of natural imitation, or correspondence to 20 the individual ideas, or to the tone of feeling with which they are conveyed to others. The jerks, the breaks, the inequalities, and harshnesses of prose are fatal to the flow of a poetical imagination, as a jolting road or a stumbling horse disturbs the reverie of an absent man. But poetry makes these odds all even. It is the music of language answering to the music of the mind, untying, as it were, "the secret soul of harmony." Wherever any object takes such a hold of the mind as to make us dwell upon it and brood 30 over it, melting the heart in tenderness or kindling it to a sentiment of enthusiasm ; wherever a movement of imagination or passion is impressed on the mind, by which it seeks to prolong and repeat the

emotion, to bring all other objects into accord with it, and to give the same movement of harmony, sustained and continuous or gradually varied according to the occasion, to the sounds that express it—this is poetry. The musical in sound is the sustained and continuous; the musical in thought is the sustained and continuous also. There is a near connection between music and deep-rooted passion. Mad people sing. As often as articulation passes naturally
10 into intonation, there poetry begins. Where one idea gives a tone and colour to others, where one feeling melts others into it, there can be no reason why the same principle should not be extended to the sounds by which the voice utters these emotions of the soul and blends syllables and lines into each other. It is to supply the inherent defect of harmony in the customary mechanism of language, to make the sound an echo to the sense, when the sense becomes a sort of echo to itself—to mingle the tide of verse, “the
20 golden cadences of poetry,” with the tide of feeling, flowing and murmuring as it flows—in short, to take the language of the imagination from off the ground, and enable it to spread its wings where it may indulge its own impulses—

“Sailing with supreme dominion
Through the azure deep of air”—

without being stopped, or fretted, or diverted with the abruptnesses and petty obstacles and discordant flats and sharps of prose, that poetry was invented.
30 It is to common language what springs are to a carriage, or wings to feet. In ordinary speech we arrive at a certain harmony by the modulations of the voice :

in poetry the same thing is done systematically by a regular collocation of syllables. It has been well observed that every one who declaims warmly, or grows intent upon a subject, rises into a sort of blank verse or measured prose. The merchant, as described in Chaucer, went on his way "sounding always the increase of his winning." Every prose writer has more or less of rhythmical adaptation, except poets, who, when deprived of the regular mechanism of verse, seem to have no principle of modulation left in their writings. 10

An excuse might be made for rhyme in the same manner. It is but fair that the ear should linger on the sounds that delight it, or avail itself of the same brilliant coincidence and unexpected recurrence of syllables that have been displayed in the invention and collocation of images. It is allowed that rhyme assists the memory; and a man of wit and shrewdness has been heard to say that the only four good lines of poetry are the well-known ones which tell the number of days in the months of the year— 20

"Thirty days hath September," &c.

But if the jingle of names assists the memory, may it not also quicken the fancy? and there are other things worth having at our fingers' ends besides the contents of the almanac. Pope's versification is tiresome from its excessive sweetness and uniformity. Shakespeare's blank verse is the perfection of dramatic dialogue.

All is not poetry that passes for such; nor does verse make the whole difference between poetry and prose. The 'Iliad' does not cease to be poetry in a 30 literal translation; and Addison's 'Campaign' has been very properly denominated a Gazette in rhyme. Com-

mon prose differs from poetry, as treating for the most part either of such trite, familiar, and irksome matters of fact as convey no extraordinary impulse to the imagination, or else of such difficult and laborious processes of the understanding as do not admit of the wayward or violent movements either of the imagination or the passions.

I will mention three works which come as near to poetry as possible without absolutely being so—namely, 10 the ‘Pilgrim’s Progress,’ ‘Robinson Crusoe,’ and the ‘Tales of Boccaccio.’ Chaucer and Dryden have translated some of the last into English rhyme, but the essence and the power of poetry was there before. That which lifts the spirit above the earth, which draws the soul out of itself with indescribable longings, is poetry in kind, and generally fit to become so in name, by being “married to immortal verse.” If it is of the essence of poetry to strike and fix the imagination, whether we will or no, to make the eye 20 of childhood glisten with the starting tear, to be never thought of afterwards with indifference, John Bunyan and Daniel Defoe may be permitted to pass for poets in their way. The mixture of fancy and reality in the ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ was never equalled in any allegory. His pilgrims walk above the earth, and yet are on it. What zeal, what beauty, what truth of fiction! What deep feeling in the description of Christian’s swimming across the water at last, and in the picture of the Shining Ones within the gates, 30 with wings at their backs and garlands on their heads, who are to wipe all tears from his eyes! The writer’s genius, though not “dipped in dews of Castalie,” was baptised with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The

prints in this book are no small part of it. If the confinement of Philoctetes in the island of Lemnos was a subject for the most beautiful of all the Greek tragedies, what shall we say to Robinson Crusoe in his? Take the speech of the Greek hero on leaving his cave, beautiful as it is, and compare it with the reflections of the English adventurer in his solitary place of confinement. The thoughts of home, and of all from which he is for ever cut off, swell and press against his bosom as the heaving ocean rolls 10 its ceaseless tide against the rocky shore, and the very beatings of his heart become audible in the eternal silence that surrounds him. Thus he says :

“As I walked about, either in my hunting, or for viewing the country, the anguish of my soul at my condition would break out upon me on a sudden, and my very heart would die within me to think of the woods, the mountains, the deserts I was in, and how I was a prisoner, locked up with the eternal bars and bolts of the ocean, in an uninhabited wilderness, without redemption. In the midst of 20 the greatest composesures of my mind, this would break out upon me like a storm, and make me wring my hands, and weep like a child. Sometimes it would take me in the middle of my work, and I would immediately sit down and sigh, and look upon the ground for an hour or two together ; and this was still worse to me, for if I could burst out into tears, or vent myself by words, it would go off, and the grief, having exhausted itself, would abate.”

The story of his adventures would not make a poem like the ‘Odyssey,’ it is true ; but the relator had the 30 true genius of a poet. It has been made a question whether Richardson’s romances are poetry ; and the answer, perhaps, is that they are not poetry because they are not romance. The interest is worked up to

an inconceivable height ; but it is by an infinite number of little things, by incessant labour and calls upon the attention, by a repetition of blows that have no rebound in them. The sympathy excited is not a voluntary contribution, but a tax. Nothing is unforced and spontaneous. There is a want of elasticity and motion. The story does not “give an echo to the seat where love is throned.” The heart does not answer of itself like a chord in music. The fancy
 10 does not run on before the writer with breathless expectation, but is dragged along with an infinite number of pins and wheels, like those with which the Lilliputians dragged Gulliver pinioned to the royal palace. Sir Charles Grandison is a coxcomb. What sort of a figure would he cut, translated into an epic poem, by the side of Achilles? Clarissa, the divine Clarissa, is too interesting by half. She is interesting in her ruffles, in her gloves, her samplers, her aunts and uncles—she is interesting in all that is uninter-
 20 esting. Such things, however intensely they may be brought home to us, are not conductors to the imagination. There is infinite truth and feeling in Richardson ; but it is extracted from a *caput mortuum* of circumstances : it does not evaporate of itself. His poetical genius is like Ariel confined in a pine-tree, and requires an artificial process to let it out. Shakespeare says—

“Our poesy is as a gum, which oozes
 From whence ’tis nourished ; . . . our gentle flame
 30 Provokes itself, and, like the current, flies
 Each bound it chafes.”¹

¹ Burke’s writings are not poetry, notwithstanding the vividness of the fancy, because the subject-matter is abstruse and dry : not

I shall conclude this general account with some remarks on four of the principal works of poetry in the world, at different periods of history—Homer, the Bible, Dante, and, let me add, Ossian. In Homer, the principle of action or life is predominant; in the Bible, the principle of faith and the idea of Providence; Dante is a personification of blind will; and in Ossian we see the decay of life and the lag end of the world. Homer's poetry is the heroic: it is full of life and action; it is bright as the day, strong as 10 a river. In the vigour of his intellect, he grapples with all the objects of nature, and enters into all the relations of social life. He saw many countries, and the manners of many men; and he has brought them all together in his poem. He describes his heroes going to battle with a prodigality of life arising from an exuberance of animal spirits: we see them before us, their number and their order of battle, poured out upon the plain "all plumed like ostriches, like eagles newly bathed, wanton as goats, wild as young bulls, 20 youthful as May, and gorgeous as the sun at midsummer," covered with glittering armour, with dust and blood; while the gods quaff their nectar in golden cups or mingle in the fray, and the old men as-natural, but artificial. The difference between poetry and eloquence is that the one is the eloquence of the imagination, and the other of the understanding. Eloquence tries to persuade the will and convince the reason: poetry produces its effect by instantaneous sympathy. Nothing is a subject for poetry that admits of a dispute. Poets are in general bad prose writers, because their images, though fine in themselves, are not to the purpose and do not carry on the argument. The French poetry wants the forms of the imagination. It is didactic more than dramatic. And some of our own poetry which has been most admired is only poetry in the rhyme, and in the studied use of poetic diction.

sembled on the walls of Troy rise up with reverence as Helen passes by them. The multitude of things in Homer is wonderful : their splendour, their truth, their force, and variety. His poetry is, like his religion, the poetry of number and form : he describes the bodies as well as the souls of men.

The poetry of the Bible is that of imagination and of faith : it is abstract and disembodied : it is not the poetry of form, but of power ; not of multitude, but
10 of immensity. It does not divide into many, but aggrandises into one. Its ideas of nature are like its ideas of God. It is not the poetry of social life, but of solitude : each man seems alone in the world with the original forms of nature—the rocks, the earth, and the sky. It is not the poetry of action or heroic enterprise, but of faith in a supreme Providence and resignation to the power that governs the universe. As the idea of God was removed farther from humanity and a scattered polytheism, it became more pro-
20 found and intense as it became more universal, for the Infinite is present to everything : “ If we fly into the uttermost parts of the earth, it is there also ; if we turn to the east or the west, we cannot escape from it.” Man is thus aggrandised in the image of his Maker. The history of the patriarchs is of this kind : they are founders of the chosen race of people, the inheritors of the earth ; they exist in the generations which are to come after them. Their poetry, like their religious creed, is vast, unformed, obscure, and
30 infinite ; a vision is upon it ; an invisible hand is suspended over it. The spirit of the Christian religion consists in the glory hereafter to be revealed ; but in the Hebrew dispensation Providence took an im-

mediate share in the affairs of this life. Jacob's dream arose out of this intimate communion between heaven and earth: it was this that let down, in the sight of the youthful patriarch, a golden ladder from the sky to the earth, with angels ascending and descending upon it, and shed a light upon the lonely place which can never pass away. The story of Ruth again, is as if all the depth of natural affection in the human race was involved in her breast. There are descriptions in the book of Job more prodigal of imagery, more intense in passion, than anything in Homer—as that of the state of his prosperity, and of the vision that came upon him by night. The metaphors in the Old Testament are more boldly figurative. Things were collected more into masses, and gave a greater momentum to the imagination. 10

Dante was the father of modern poetry, and he may therefore claim a place in this connection. His poem is the first great step from Gothic darkness and barbarism; and the struggle of thought in it to burst the thralldom in which the human mind had been so long held, is felt in every page. He stood bewildered, not appalled, on that dark shore which separates the ancient and the modern world; and saw the glories of antiquity dawning through the abyss of time, while revelation opened its passage to the other world. He was lost in wonder at what had been done before him, and he dared to emulate it. Dante seems to have been indebted to the Bible for the gloomy tone of his mind, as well as for the prophetic fury which exalts and kindles his poetry; but he is utterly unlike Homer. His genius is not a sparkling flame, but the sullen heat of a furnace. He is power, passion, self- 30

will personified. In all that relates to the descriptive or fanciful part of poetry, he bears no comparison to many who have gone before or who have come after him ; but there is a gloomy abstraction in his conceptions, which lies like a dead weight upon the mind ; a benumbing stupor, a breathless awe, from the intensity of the impression ; a terrible obscurity, like that which oppresses us in dreams ; an identity of interest, which moulds every object to its own purpose and clothes all things with the passions and imaginations of the human soul,—that make amends for all other deficiencies. The immediate objects he presents to the mind are not much in themselves ; they want grandeur, beauty, and order ; but they become everything by the force of the character he impresses upon them. His mind lends its own power to the objects which it contemplates, instead of borrowing it from them. He takes advantage even of the nakedness and dreary vacuity of his subject. His imagination peoples the shades of death and broods over the silent air. He is the severest of all writers, the most hard and impenetrable, the most opposite to the flowery and glittering ; who relies most on his own power, and the sense of it in others, and who leaves most room to the imagination of his readers. Dante's only endeavour is to interest ; and he interests by exciting our sympathy with the emotion by which he is himself possessed. He does not place before us the objects by which that emotion has been created ; but he seizes on the attention, by showing us the effect they produce on his feelings ; and his poetry accordingly gives the same thrilling and overwhelming sensation which is caught by gazing on

the face of a person who has seen some object of horror. The improbability of the events, the abruptness and monotony in the 'Inferno,' are excessive: but the interest never flags, from the continued earnestness of the author's mind. Dànte's great power is in combining internal feelings with external objects. Thus the gate of hell, on which that withering inscription is written, seems to be endowed with speech and consciousness, and to utter its dread warning not without a sense of mortal woes. This author habitually unites the absolutely local and individual with the greatest wildness and mysticism. In the midst of the obscure and shadowy regions of the lower world a tomb suddenly rises up with the inscription, "I am the tomb of Pope Anastasius the Sixth"; and half the personages whom he has crowded into the "Inferno" are his own acquaintance. All this, perhaps, tends to heighten the effect by the bold intermixture of realities, and by an appeal, as it were, to the individual knowledge and experience of the reader. He affords few subjects for picture. There is, indeed, one gigantic one, that of Count Ugolino, of which Michael Angelo made a bas-relief, and which Sir Joshua Reynolds ought not to have painted. 10 20

Another writer whom I shall mention last, and whom I cannot persuade myself to think a mere modern in the groundwork, is Ossian. He is a feeling and a name that can never be destroyed in the minds of his readers. As Homer is the first vigour and lustihead, Ossian is the decay and old age of poetry. He lives only in the recollection and regret of the past. There is one impression which he conveys more entirely than all other poets—namely, the 30

sense of privation, the loss of all things, of friends, of good name, of country; he is even without God in the world. He converses only with the spirits of the departed, with the motionless and silent clouds. The cold moonlight sheds its faint lustre on his head; the fox peeps out of the ruined tower; the thistle waves its beard to the wandering gale; and the strings of his harp seem, as the hand of age, as the tale of other times passes over them, to sigh and rustle like
10 the dry reeds in the winter's wind! The feeling of cheerless desolation, of the loss of the pith and sap of existence, of the annihilation of the substance, and the clinging to the shadow of all things, as in a mock embrace, is here perfect. In this way the lamentation of Selma for the loss of Salgar is the finest of all. If it were indeed possible to show that this writer was nothing, it would only be another instance of mutability, another blank made, another void left in the heart, another confirmation of that feeling which makes him
20 so often complain, "Roll on, ye dark brown years, ye bring no joy on your wing to Ossian!"

III.

THE AGE OF ELIZABETH.

THE age of Elizabeth was distinguished beyond perhaps any other in our history by a number of great men, famous in different ways, and whose names have come down to us with unblemished honours : statesmen, warriors, divines, scholars, poets, and philosophers ; Raleigh, Drake, Coke, Hooker, and, higher and more sounding still, and still more frequent in our mouths, Shakespeare, Spenser, Sidney, Bacon, Jonson, Beaumont, and Fletcher, men whom fame has eternised in her long and lasting scroll, and who by their words 10 and acts were benefactors of their country and ornaments of human nature. Their attainments of different kinds bore the same general stamp, and it was sterling : what they did had the mark of their age and country upon it. Perhaps the genius of Great Britain (if I may so speak without offence or flattery) never shone out fuller or brighter, or looked more like itself, than at this period. Our writers and great men had something in them that savoured of the soil from which they grew : they were not French, they 20 were not Dutch, or German, or Greek, or Latin ; they were truly English. They did not look out of themselves to see what they should be ; they sought for

truth and nature, and found it in themselves. There was no tinsel, and but little art; they were not the spoiled children of affectation and refinement, but a bold, vigorous, independent race of thinkers, with prodigious strength and energy, with none but natural grace, and heartfelt, unobtrusive delicacy. They were not at all sophisticated. The mind of their country was great in them, and it prevailed. With their learning and unexampled acquirement they did not forget
10 that they were men: with all their endeavours after excellence, they did not lay aside the strong original bent and character of their minds. What they performed was chiefly nature's handiwork; and time has claimed it for his own. To these, however, might be added others not less learned, nor with a scarce less happy vein, but less fortunate in the event, who, though as renowned in their day, have sunk into "mere oblivion," and of whom the only record (but that the noblest) is to be found in their works. Their
20 works and their names, "poor, poor, dumb names," are all that remains of such men as Webster, Dekker, Marston, Marlowe, Chapman, Heywood, Middleton, and Rowley! "How lov'd, how honour'd once avails them not," though they were the friends and fellow-labourers of Shakespeare, sharing his fame and fortunes with him, the rivals of Jonson, and the masters of Beaumont and Fletcher's well-sung woes! They went out one by one unnoticed, like evening lights; or were swallowed up in the headlong torrent of puri-
30 tanic zeal which succeeded and swept away everything in its unsparing course, throwing up the wrecks of taste and genius at random, and at long fitful intervals, amidst the painted gewgaws and foreign

frippery of the reign of Charles II., and from which we are only now recovering the scattered fragments and broken images to erect a temple to true Fame! How long before it will be completed?

If I can do anything to rescue some of these writers from hopeless obscurity, and to do them right, without prejudice to well deserved reputation, I shall have succeeded in what I chiefly propose. I shall not attempt, indeed, to adjust the spelling, or restore the pointing, as if the genius of poetry lay hid in errors 10 of the press, but, leaving these weightier matters of criticism to those who are more able and willing to bear the burden, try to bring out their real beauties to the eager sight, "draw the curtain of Time, and show the picture of Genius," restraining my own admiration within reasonable bounds.

There is not a lower ambition, a poorer way of thought, than that which would confine all excellence, or arrogate its final accomplishment, to the present 20 or modern times. We ordinarily speak and think of those who had the misfortune to write or live before us as labouring under very singular privations and disadvantages in not having the benefit of those improvements which we have made, as buried in the grossest ignorance, or the slaves of "poring pedantry"; and we make a cheap and infallible estimate of their progress in civilisation upon a graduated scale of perfectibility, calculated from the meridian of our own times. If we have pretty well got rid of the narrow bigotry that would limit all sense or virtue to our own 30 country, and have fraternised, like true cosmopolites, with our neighbours and contemporaries, we have made our self-love amends by letting the generation we live

in engross nearly all our admiration, and by pronouncing a sweeping sentence of barbarism and ignorance on our ancestry backwards, from the commencement (as near as can be) of the nineteenth or the latter end of the eighteenth century. From thence we date a new era, the dawn of our own intellect, and that of the world, like "the sacred influence of light" glimmering on the confines of "Chaos and old night": new manners rise, and all the cumbrous "pomp of
10 elder days" vanishes, and is lost in worse than Gothic darkness. Pavilioned in the glittering pride of our superficial accomplishments and upstart pretensions, we fancy that everything beyond that magic circle is prejudice and error, and all before the present enlightened period but a dull and useless blank in the great map of time. We are so dazzled with the gloss and novelty of modern discoveries that we cannot take into our mind's eye the vast expanse, the lengthened perspective of human intellect; and a cloud hangs over
20 and conceals its loftiest monuments, if they are removed to a little distance from us—the cloud of our vanity and short-sightedness. The modern sciolist stultifies all understanding but his own, and that which he conceives like his own. We think, in this age of reason and consummation of philosophy, because we knew nothing twenty or thirty years ago, and began then to think for the first time in our lives, that the rest of mankind were in the same predicament, and never knew anything till we did; that
30 the world had grown old in sloth and ignorance, had dreamt out its lone minority of five thousand years in a dozing state, and that it first began to wake out of sleep, to rouse itself, and look about it, startled by

the light of our unexpected discoveries and the noise we made about them. Strange error of our infatuated self-love. Because the clothes we remember to have seen worn when we were children are now out of fashion, and our grandmothers were then old women, we conceive, with magnanimous continuity of reasoning, that it must have been much worse three hundred years before, and that grace, youth, and beauty are things of modern date—as if nature had ever been old, or the sun had first shone on our folly and pre- 10
sumption. Because, in a word, the last generation, when tottering off the stage, were not so active, so sprightly, and so promising as we were, we begin to imagine that people formerly must have crawled about in a feeble, torpid state, like flies in winter, in a sort of dim twilight of the understanding; “nor can we think what thoughts they could conceive” in the absence of all those topics that so agreeably enliven and diversify our conversation and literature, mistaking the imperfection of our knowledge for the defect of their 20
organs, as if it was necessary for us to have a register and certificate of their thoughts, or as if, because they did not see with our eyes, hear with our ears, and understand with our understandings, they could hear, see, and understand nothing. A falser inference could not be drawn, nor one more contrary to the maxims and cautions of a wise humanity. “Think,” says Shakespeare, the prompter of good and true feelings, “there’s livers out of Britain.” So there have been thinkers, and great and sound ones, before our time. 30
They had the same capacities that we have, sometimes greater motives for their exertion, and for the most part, the same subject-matter to work upon.

What we learn from nature we may hope to do as well as they; what we learn from them we may in general expect to do worse. What is, I think, as likely as anything to cure us of this overweening admiration of the present and unmingled contempt for past times, is the looking at the finest old pictures: at Raphael's heads, at Titian's faces, at Claude's landscapes. We have there the evidence of the senses, without the alterations of opinion or disguise of language. We there see the blood circulate through the
10 veins (long before it was known that it did so), the same red and white "by nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on," the same thoughts passing through the mind and seated on the lips, the same blue sky and glittering sunny vales where "Pan, knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance, leads on the eternal Spring." And we begin to feel that nature and the mind of man are not a thing of yesterday as we had been led to suppose, and that "there are more things
20 between heaven and earth than were ever dreamt of in our philosophy." Or grant that we improve, in some respects, in a uniformly progressive ratio, and build, Babel-high, on the foundation of other men's knowledge, as in matters of science and speculative inquiry, where, by going often over the same general ground, certain general conclusions have been arrived at, and in the number of persons reasoning on a given subject, truth has at last been hit upon, and long-established error exploded; yet this does not apply
30 to cases of individual power and knowledge, to a million of things besides, in which we are still to seek as much as ever, and in which we can only hope to find by going to the fountain-head of thought

and experience. We are quite wrong in supposing (as we are apt to do) that we can plead an exclusive title to wit and wisdom, to taste and genius, as the net produce and clear reversion of the age we live in, and that all we have to do to be great is to despise those who have gone before us as nothing.

Or even if we admit a saving clause in this sweeping proscription and do not make the rule absolute, the very nature of the exception shows the spirit in which they are made. We single out one or two 10 striking instances, say Shakespeare or Lord Bacon, which we would fain treat as prodigies, and as a marked contrast to the rudeness and barbarism that surrounded them. These we delight to dwell upon and magnify; the praise and wonder we heap upon their shrines are at the expense of the time in which they lived, and would leave it poor indeed. We make them out something more than human, "matchless, divine, what we will," so to make them no rule for their age, and no infringement of the abstract claim to 20 superiority which we set up. Instead of letting them reflect any lustre or add any credit to the period of history to which they rightfully belong, we only make use of their example to insult and degrade it still more beneath our own level.

It is the present fashion to speak with veneration of old English literature; but the homage we pay to it is more akin to the rites of superstition than to the worship of true religion. Our faith is doubtful; our love cold; our knowledge little or none. We now 30 and then repeat the names of some of the old writers by rote, but we are shy of looking into their works. Though we seem disposed to think highly of them,

and to give them every credit for a masculine and original vein of thought as a matter of literary courtesy and enlargement of taste, we are afraid of coming to the proof as too great a trial of our candour and patience. We regard the enthusiastic admiration of these obsolete authors, or a desire to make proselytes to a belief in their extraordinary merits, as an amiable weakness, a pleasing delusion; and prepare to listen to some favourite passage that may be referred to in
10 support of this singular taste with an incredulous smile; and are in no small pain for the result of the hazardous experiment; feeling much the same awkward condescending disposition to patronise these first crude attempts at poetry and lisplings of the Muse as when a fond parent brings forward a bashful child to make a display of its wit or learning. We hope the best, put a good face on the matter, but are sadly afraid the thing cannot answer. Dr Johnson said of these writers generally that "they were sought after
20 because they were scarce, and would not have been scarce had they been much esteemed." His decision is neither true history nor sound criticism. They were esteemed, and they deserved to be so.

One cause that might be pointed out here as having contributed to the long-continued neglect of our earlier writers lies in the very nature of our academic institutions, which unavoidably neutralises a taste for the productions of native genius, estranges the mind from the history of our own literature, and makes it in each
30 successive age like a book sealed. The Greek and Roman classics are a sort of privileged text-books, the standing order of the day, in a University education, and leave little leisure for a competent acquaintance

with, or due admiration of, a whole host of able writers of our own, who are suffered to moulder in obscurity on the shelves of our libraries, with a decent reservation of one or two top-names, that are cried up for form's sake and to save the national character. Thus we keep a few of these always ready in capitals, and strike off the rest to prevent the tendency to a superfluous population in the republic of letters; in other words, to prevent the writers from becoming more numerous than the readers. The ancients are 10 become effete in this respect, they no longer increase and multiply; or if they have imitators among us, no one is expected to read, and still less to admire them. It is not possible that the learned professors and the reading public should clash in this way, or necessary for them to use any precautions against each other. But it is not the same with the living languages, where there is danger of being overwhelmed by the crowd of competitors, and pedantry has combined with ignorance to cancel their unsatisfied claims. 20

We affect to wonder at Shakespeare, and one or two more of that period, as solitary instances upon record; whereas it is our own dearth of information that makes the waste; for there is no time more populous of intellect, or more prolific of intellectual wealth, than the one we are speaking of. Shakespeare did not look upon himself in this light, as a sort of monster of poetical genius, or on his contemporaries as "less than smallest dwarfs," when he speaks with true, not false modesty, of himself and them, and of his wayward 30 thoughts, "desiring this man's art and that man's scope." We fancy that there were no such men that could either add to or take anything away from him;

but such there were. He indeed overlooks and commands the admiration of posterity, but he does it from the *table-land* of the age in which he lived. He towered above his fellows, "in shape and gesture proudly eminent," but he was one of a race of giants, the tallest, the strongest, the most graceful and beautiful of them; but it was a common and a noble brood. He was not something sacred and aloof from the vulgar herd of men, but shook hands with nature
10 and the circumstances of the time, and is distinguished from his immediate contemporaries, not in kind, but in degree and greater variety of excellence. He did not form a class or species by himself, but belonged to a class or species. His age was necessary to him; nor could he have been wrenched from his place in the edifice of which he was so conspicuous a part without equal injury to himself and it. Mr Wordsworth says of Milton that "his soul was like a star, and dwelt apart." This cannot be said with any propriety
20 of Shakespeare, who certainly moved in a constellation of bright luminaries, and "drew after him a third part of the heavens." If we allow for argument's sake (or for truth's, which is better) that he was in himself equal to all his competitors put together, yet there was more dramatic excellence in that age than in the whole of the period that has elapsed since. If his contemporaries, with their united strength, would hardly make one Shakespeare, certain it is that all his successors would not make half a one. With the
30 exception of a single writer, Otway, and of a single play of his, 'Venice Preserved,' there is nobody in tragedy and dramatic poetry (I do not here speak of comedy) to be compared to the great men of the age

of Shakespeare and immediately after. They are a mighty phalanx of kindred spirits closing him round, moving in the same orbit, and impelled by the same causes in their whirling and eccentric career. They had the same faults and the same excellences; the same strength, and depth, and richness, the same truth of character, passion, imagination, thought, and language, thrown, heaped, massed together without careful polishing or exact method, but poured out in unconcerned profusion from the lap of nature and 10
genius in boundless and unrivalled magnificence. The sweetness of Dekker, the thought of Marston, the gravity of Chapman, the grace of Fletcher and his young-eyed wit, Jonson's learned sock, the flowing vein of Middleton, Heywood's ease, the pathos of Webster, and Marlowe's deep designs, add a double lustre to the sweetness, thought, gravity, grace, wit, artless nature, copiousness, ease, pathos, and sublime conceptions of Shakespeare's Muse. They are indeed the scale by which we can best ascend to the true 20
knowledge and love of him. Our admiration of them does not lessen our relish for him, but, on the contrary, increases and confirms it. For such an extraordinary combination and development of fancy and genius many causes may be assigned, and we seek for the chief of them in religion, in politics, in the circumstances of the time, the recent diffusion of letters, in local situation, and in the character of the men who adorned that period and availed themselves so nobly of the advantages placed within their reach. 30

I shall here attempt to give a general sketch of these causes, and of the manner in which they operated to mould and stamp the poetry of the country

at the period of which I have to treat, independently of incidental and fortuitous causes, for which there is no accounting, but which, after all, have often the greatest share in determining the most important results.

The first cause I shall mention as contributing to this general effect was the Reformation, which had just then taken place. This event gave a mighty impulse and increased activity to thought and inquiry, and agitated the inert mass of accumulated prejudices
10 throughout Europe. The effect of the concussion was general, but the shock was greatest in this country. It toppled down the full-grown, intolerable abuses of centuries at a blow ; heaved the ground from under the feet of bigoted faith and slavish obedience ; and the roar and dashing of opinions, loosened from their accustomed hold, might be heard like the noise of an angry sea, and has never yet subsided. Germany first broke the spell of misbegotten fear, and gave the watchword ; but England joined the shout, and echoed
20 it back with her island voice from her thousand cliffs and craggy shores in a longer and a louder strain. With that cry the genius of Great Britain rose and threw down the gauntlet to the nations. There was a mighty fermentation ; the waters were out ; public opinion was in a state of projection. Liberty was held out to all to think and speak the truth. Men's brains were busy, their spirits stirring, their hearts full, and their hands not idle. Their eyes were open to expect the greatest things, and their ears burned with curiosity
30 and zeal to know the truth, that the truth might make them free. The death-blow which had been struck at scarlet vice and bloated hypocrisy loosened their tongues, and made the talismans and love-tokens of

Popish superstition, with which she had beguiled her followers and committed abominations with the people, fall harmless from their necks.

The translation of the Bible was the chief engine in the great work. It threw open, by a secret spring, the rich treasures of religion and morality which had been there locked up as in a shrine. It revealed the visions of the prophets and conveyed the lessons of inspired teachers (such they were thought) to the meanest of the people. It gave them a common interest in the 10 common cause. Their hearts burnt within them as they read. It gave a *mind* to the people by giving them common subjects of thought and feeling. It cemented their union of character and sentiment; it created endless diversity and collision of opinion. They found objects to employ their faculties, and a motive in the magnitude of the consequences attached to them to exert the utmost eagerness in the pursuit of truth, and the most daring intrepidity in maintain- 20 ing it. Religious controversy sharpens the understanding by the subtlety and remoteness of the topics it discusses, and braces the will by their infinite importance. We perceive in the history of this period a nervous masculine intellect. No levity, no feebleness, no indifference; or if there were, it is a relaxation from the intense activity which gives a tone to its general character. But there is a gravity approaching to piety; a seriousness of impression, a conscientious severity of argument, a habitual fervour and enthusiasm in their mode of handling almost every subject. 30 The debates of the schoolmen were sharp and subtle enough; but they wanted interest and grandeur, and were,* besides, confined to a few: they did not affect

the general mass of the community. But the Bible was thrown open to all ranks and conditions "to run and read," with its wonderful table of contents from Genesis to the Revelations. Every village in England would present the scene so well described in Burns's 'Cottar's Saturday Night.' I cannot think that all this variety and weight of knowledge could be thrown in all at once upon the mind of a people and not make some impression upon it, the traces of which might be
10 discerned in the manners and literature of the age. For, to leave more disputable points and take only the historical parts of the Old Testament or the moral sentiments of the New, there is nothing like them in the power of exciting awe and admiration, or of riveting sympathy. We see what Milton has made of the account of the Creation from the manner in which he has treated it, imbued and impregnated with the spirit of the time of which we speak. Or what is there
20 equal (in that romantic interest and patriarchal simplicity which goes to the heart of a country, and rouses it, as it were, from its lair in wastes and wildernesses) to the story of Joseph and his Brethren, of Rachel and Laban, of Jacob's Dream, of Ruth and Boaz, the descriptions in the book of Job, the deliverance of the Jews out of Egypt, or the account of their captivity and return from Babylon? There is, in all these parts of the Scripture, and numberless more of the same kind, to pass over the Orphic hymns of David, the prophetic denunciations of Isaiah, or the
30 gorgeous visions of Ezekiel, an originality, a vastness of conception, a depth and tenderness of feeling, and a touching simplicity in the mode of narration, which he who does not feel must be made of no "penetrable

stuff." There is something in the character of Christ too (leaving religious faith quite out of the question) of more sweetness and majesty, and more likely to work a change in the mind of man by the contemplation of its idea alone, than any to be found in history, whether actual or feigned. This character is that of a sublime humanity, such as was never seen on earth before nor since. This shone manifestly both in His words and actions. We see it in His washing the disciples' feet the night before His death, that unspeak- 10
able instance of humility and love, "above all art, all meanness, and all pride," and in the leave He took of them on that occasion, "My peace I give unto you : that peace which the world cannot give, give I unto you"; and in His last commandment, that "they should love one another." Who can read the account of His behaviour on the cross, when turning to His mother He said, "Woman, behold thy son," and to the disciple John, "Behold thy mother," and "from that hour that disciple took her to his own home," 20
without having his heart smote within him? We see it in His treatment of the woman taken in adultery, and in His excuse for the woman who poured precious ointment on His garment as an offering of devotion and love, which is here all in all. His religion was the religion of the heart. We see it in His discourse with the disciples as they walked together towards Emmaus, when their hearts burned within them; in His sermon from the Mount, in His parable of the Good Samaritan, and in that of the Prodigal Son—in 30
every act and word of His life a grace, a mildness, a dignity of love, a patience and wisdom worthy of the Son of God. His whole life and being were imbued,

steeped in this word, *charity*: it was the spring, the well-head from which every thought and feeling gushed into act; and it was this that breathed a mild glory from His face in that last agony upon the cross, "when the meek Saviour bowed His head and died," praying for His enemies. He was the first true teacher of morality, for He alone conceived the idea of a pure humanity. He redeemed man from the worship of that idol, self, and instructed him by precept and example to love his neighbour as himself, to forgive our enemies, to do good to those that curse us and despitefully use us. He taught the love of good for the sake of good, without regard to personal or sinister views, and made the affections of the heart the sole seat of morality, instead of the pride of the understanding or the sternness of the will. In answering the question, "Who is our neighbour?" as one who stands in need of our assistance and whose wounds we can bind up, He has done more to humanise the thoughts and tame the unruly passions than all who have tried to reform and benefit mankind. The very idea of abstract benevolence, of the desire to do good because another wants our services, and of regarding the human race as one family, the offspring of one common parent, is hardly to be found in any other code or system. It was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." The Greeks and Romans never thought of considering others but as they were Greeks or Romans, as they were bound to them by certain positive ties, or, on the other hand, as separated from them by fiercer antipathies. Their virtues were the virtues of political machines; their vices were the vices of demons ready to inflict or

endure pain with obdurate and remorseless inflexibility of purpose. But in the Christian religion, "we perceive a softness coming over the heart of a nation, and the iron scales that fence and harden it melt and drop off." It becomes malleable, capable of pity, of forgiveness, of relaxing in its claims, and remitting its power. We strike it, and it does not hurt us: it is not steel or marble, but flesh and blood, clay tempered with tears, and "soft as sinews of the new-born babe." The gospel was first preached to the poor, for it consulted their wants and interests, not its own pride and arrogance. It first promulgated the equality of mankind in the community of duties and benefits. It denounced the iniquities of the chief priests and pharisees, and declared itself at variance with principalities and powers, for it sympathises not with the oppressor, but the oppressed. It first abolished slavery, for it did not consider the power of the will to inflict injury as clothing it with a right to do so. Its law is good, not power. It at the same time tended to wean the mind from the grossness of sense, and a particle of its divine flame was lent to brighten and purify the lamp of love!

There have been persons who, being sceptics as to the divine mission of Christ, have taken an accountable prejudice to His doctrines, and have been disposed to deny the merit of His character; but this was not the feeling of the great men in the age of Elizabeth (whatever might be their belief), one of whom says of Him, with a boldness equal to its piety—

"The best of men
That e'er wore earth about him, was a sufferer;
A soft, meek, patient, humble, tranquil spirit;
The first true gentleman that ever breathed."

This was old honest Dekker, and the lines ought to embalm his memory to every one who has a sense either of religion, or philosophy, or humanity, or true genius. Nor can I help thinking that we may discern the traces of the influence exerted by religious faith in the spirit of the poetry of the age of Elizabeth, in the means of exciting terror and pity, in the delineation of the passions of grief, remorse, love, sympathy, the sense of shame, in the fond desires, the longings after
10 immortality, in the heaven of hope and the abyss of despair it lays open before us.¹

The literature of this age, then, I would say, was strongly influenced (among other causes) first by the spirit of Christianity, and secondly by the spirit of Protestantism.

The effects of the Reformation on politics and philosophy may be seen in the writings and history of the next and of the following ages. They are still at work, and will continue to be so. The effects on
20 the poetry of the time were chiefly confined to the moulding of the character, and giving a powerful impulse to the intellect of the country. The immediate use or application that was made of religion to subjects of imagination and fiction was not (from an obvious ground of separation) so direct or frequent as that which was made of the classical and romantic literature.

For much about the same time the rich and fascinating stores of the Greek and Roman mythology,
30 and those of the romantic poetry of Spain and Italy,

¹ In some Roman Catholic countries, pictures in part supplied the place of the translation of the Bible ; and this dumb art arose in the silence of the written oracles.

were eagerly explored by the curious, and thrown open in translations to the admiring gaze of the vulgar. This last circumstance could hardly have afforded so much advantage to the poets of that day, who were themselves, in fact, the translators, as it shows the general curiosity and increasing interest in such subjects as a prevailing feature of the times. There were translations of Tasso by Fairfax, and of Ariosto by Harrington, of Homer and Hesiod by Chapman, and of Virgil long before, and Ovid soon after : there was 10 Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch, of which Shakespeare has made such admirable use in his 'Coriolanus' and 'Julius Cæsar'; and Ben Jonson's tragedies of 'Catiline' and 'Sejanus' may themselves be considered as almost literal translations into verse of Tacitus, Sallust, and Cicero's Orations in his consulship. Boccaccio, the divine Boccaccio, Petrarch, Dante, the satirist Aretine, Machiavel, Castiglione, and others, were familiar to our writers, and they make occasional mention of some few French authors, as Ronsard and Du 20 Bartas ; for the French literature had not at this stage arrived at its Augustan period, and it was the imitation of their literature a century afterwards, when it had arrived at its greatest height (itself copied from the Greek and Latin), that enfeebled and impoverished our own. But of the time that we are considering it might be said, without much extravagance, that every breath that blew, every wave that rolled to our shores, brought with it some accession to our knowledge, which was engrafted on the national genius. In fact, 30 all the disposable materials that had been accumulating for a long period of time, either in our own or in foreign countries, were now brought together, and re-

quired nothing more than to be wrought up, polished, or arranged in striking forms for ornament and use. To this every inducement prompted: the novelty of the acquisition of knowledge in many cases, the emulation of foreign wits and of immortal works, the want and the expectation of such works among ourselves, the opportunity and encouragement afforded for their production by leisure and affluence, and, above all, the insatiable desire of the mind to beget its own
10 image and to construct out of itself, and for the delight and admiration of the world and posterity, that excellence of which the idea exists hitherto only in its own breast, and the impression of which it would make as universal as the eye of heaven, the benefit as common as the air we breathe. The first impulse of genius is to create what never existed before; the contemplation of that which is so created is sufficient to satisfy the demands of taste; and it is the habitual study and imitation of the original models that takes away the
20 power and even wish to do the like. Taste limps after genius, and from copying the artificial models we lose sight of the living principle of nature. It is the effort we make and the impulse we acquire in overcoming the first obstacles, that projects us forward; it is the necessity for exertion that makes us conscious of our strength; but this necessity and this impulse once removed, the tide of fancy and enthusiasm, which is at first a running stream, soon settles and crusts into the standing pool of dulness, criticism,
30 and *virtu*.

What also gave an unusual impetus to the mind of man at this period was the discovery of the New World and the reading of voyages and travels.

Green islands and golden sands seemed to arise, as by enchantment, out of the bosom of the watery waste, and invite the cupidity or wing the imagination of the dreaming speculator. Fairyland was realised in new and unknown worlds. "Fortunate fields and groves and flowery vales, thrice happy isles," were found floating, "like those Hesperian gardens famed of old," beyond Atlantic seas, as dropped from the zenith. The people, the soil, the clime, everything gave unlimited scope to the curiosity of the traveller 10 and reader. Other manners might be said to enlarge the bounds of knowledge, and new mines of wealth were tumbled at our feet. It is from a 'Voyage to the Straits of Magellan' that Shakespeare has taken the hint of Prospero's Enchanted Island, and of the savage Caliban with his god Setebos.¹ Spenser seems to have had the same feeling in his mind in the production of his 'Faery Queen,' and vindicates his poetic fiction on this very ground of analogy—

"Right well I wote, most mighty sovereign,
That all this famous antique history
Of some the abundance of an idle brain
Will judged be, and painted forgery,
Rather than matter of just memory :
Since none that breatheth living air does know
Where is that happy land of Faery
Which I so much do vaunt, yet nowhere show,
But vouch antiquities which nobody can know. 20

But let that man with better sense advise,
That of the world least part to us is read ; 30
And daily how through hardy enterprise
Many great regions are discovered,
Which to late age were never mentioned.

¹ See a 'Voyage to the Straits of Magellan,' 1594.

Who ever heard of the Indian Peru?
 Or who in venturous vessel measured
 The Amazon's huge river, now found true?
 Or fruitfullest Virginia who did ever view?

Yet all these were when no man did them know,
 Yet have from wisest ages hidden been;
 And later times things more unknown shall show.
 Why then should witless man so much misween
 That nothing is but that which he hath seen?
 10 What if within the moon's fair shining sphere,
 What if in every other star unseen,
 Of other worlds he happily should hear?
 He wonder would much more; yet such to some appear."

Fancy's air-drawn pictures after history's waking
 dream showed like clouds over mountains; and from
 the romance of real life to the idlest fiction the transi-
 tion seemed easy. Shakespeare, as well as others of
 his time, availed himself of the old Chronicles, and of
 the traditions or fabulous inventions contained in them
 20 in such ample measure, and which had not yet been
 appropriated to the purposes of poetry or the drama.
 The stage was a new thing; and those who had to
 supply its demands laid their hands upon whatever
 came within their reach: they were not particular as
 to the means, so that they gained the end. 'Lear' is
 founded upon an old ballad; 'Othello' on an Italian
 novel; 'Hamlet' on a Danish and 'Macbeth' on a
 Scotch tradition, one of which is to be found in Saxo-
 Grammaticus and the last in Holinshed. The ghost-
 30 scenes and the witches in each are authenticated in
 the old Gothic history. There was also this connect-
 ing link between the poetry of this age and the super-
 natural traditions of a former one, that the belief in
 them was still extant, and in full force and visible

operation among the vulgar (to say no more) in the time of our authors. The appalling and wild chimeras of superstition and ignorance, "those bodiless creations that ecstasy is very cunning in," were inwoven with existing manners and opinions, and all their effects on the passions of terror or pity might be gathered from common and actual observation—might be discerned in the workings of the face, the expressions of the tongue, the writhings of a troubled conscience. "Your face, my Thane, is as a book where men may read 10 strange matters." Midnight and secret murders, too, from the imperfect state of the police, were more common, and the ferocious and brutal manners that would stamp the brow of the hardened ruffian or hired assassin more incorrigible and undisguised. The portraits of Tyrrel and Forrest were, no doubt, done from the life. We find that the ravages of the plague, the destructive rage of fire, the poisoned chalice, lean famine, the serpent's mortal sting, and the fury of wild beasts, were the common topics of their poetry, as 20 they were common occurrences in more remote periods of history. They were the strong ingredients thrown into the cauldron of tragedy to make it "thick and slab." Man's life was (as it appears to me) more full of traps and pitfalls, of hairbreadth accidents by flood and field, more waylaid by sudden and startling evils; it trod on the brink of hope and fear, stumbled upon fate unawares, while the imagination, close behind it, caught at and clung to the shape of danger, or "snatched a wild and fearful joy" from its escape. 30 The accidents of nature were less provided against: the excesses of the passions and of lawless power were less regulated, and produced more strange and

désperate catastrophes. The tales of Boccaccio are founded on the great pestilence of Florence ; Fletcher the poet died of the plague, and Marlowe was stabbed in a tavern quarrel. The strict authority of parents, the inequality of ranks, or the hereditary feuds between different families, made more unhappy loves or matches.

“The course of true love never did run smooth.”

Again, the heroic and martial spirit, which breathes in our elder writers, was yet in considerable activity
 10 in the reign of Elizabeth. “The age of chivalry was not then quite gone, nor the glory of Europe extinguished for ever.” Jousts and tournaments were still common with the nobility in England and in foreign countries. Sir Philip Sidney was particularly distinguished for his proficiency in these exercises (and indeed fell a martyr to his ambition as a soldier), and the gentle Surrey was still more famous, on the same account, just before him. It is true, the general use of fire-arms gradually superseded the necessity of
 20 skill in the sword or bravery in the person ; and, as a symptom of the rapid degeneracy in this respect, we find Sir John Suckling soon after boasting of himself as one who

“Prized black eyes, or a lucky hit
 At bowls, above all the trophies of wit.”

It was comparatively an age of peace,

“Like strength reposing on his own right arm ;”

but the sound of civil combat might still be heard in
 29 the distance, the spear glittered to the eye of memory,

or the clashing of armour struck on the imagination of the ardent and the young. They were borderers on the savage state, on the times of war and bigotry, though in the lap of arts, of luxury, and knowledge. They stood on the shore and saw the billows rolling after the storm: "they heard the tumult, and were still." The manners and out-of-door amusements were more tinged with a spirit of adventure and romance. The war with wild beasts, &c., was more strenuously kept up in country sports. I do not think 10 we could get from sedentary poets who had never mingled in the vicissitudes, the dangers, or excitements of the chase, such descriptions of hunting and other athletic games as are to be found in Shakespeare's 'Midsummer Night's Dream' or Fletcher's 'Noble Kinsmen.'

With respect to the good cheer and hospitable living of those times, I cannot agree with an ingenious and agreeable writer of the present day that it was general or frequent. The very stress laid upon certain holi- 20 days and festivals shows that they did not keep up the same Saturnalian licence and open-house all the year round. They reserved themselves for great occasions, and made the best amends they could for a year of abstinence and toil by a week of merriment and convivial indulgence. Persons in middle life at this day, who can afford a good dinner every day, do not look forward to it as any particular subject of exultation: the poor peasant, who can only contrive to treat himself to a joint of meat on a Sunday, 30 considers it as an event in the week. So, in the old Cambridge comedy of the 'Return from Parnassus,' we find this indignant description of the progress of

luxury in those days put into the mouth of one of the speakers—

“Why is't not strange to see a ragged clerk,
 Some stammell weaver, or some butcher's son,
 That scrubbed alate within a sleeveless gown,
 When the commencement, like a morrice dance,
 Hath put a bell or two about his legs,
 Created him a sweet clean gentleman :
 How then he 'gins to follow fashions.
 10 He whose thin sire dwells in a smoky roof,
 Must take tobacco, and must wear a lock.
 His thirsty dad drinks in a wooden bowl,
 But his sweet self is served in silver plate.
 His hungry sire will scrape you twenty legs
 For one good Christmas meal on New-year's day,
 But his maw must be capon-crammed each day.”

This does not look as if in those days “it snowed
 of meat and drink” as a matter of course throughout
 the year! The distinctions of dress, the badges of
 20 different professions, the very signs of the shops, which
 we have set aside for written inscriptions over the
 doors, were, as Mr Lamb observes, a sort of visible
 language to the imagination, and hints for thought.
 Like the costumes of different foreign nations, they
 had an immediate striking and picturesque effect, giv-
 ing scope to the fancy. The surface of society was
 embossed with hieroglyphics, and poetry existed “in
 act and compliment extern.” The poetry of former
 times might be directly taken from real life, as our
 30 poetry is taken from the poetry of former times. Fin-
 ally, the face of nature, which was the same glorious
 object then that it is now, was open to them; and
 coming first, they gathered her fairest flowers to live
 for ever in their verse: the movements of the human

heart were not hid from them, for they had the same passions as we, only less disguised, and less subject to control. Dekker has given an admirable description of a mad-house in one of his plays. But it might be perhaps objected that it was only a literal account taken from Bedlam at that time; and it might be answered that the old poets took the same method of describing the passions and fancies of men whom they met at large, which forms the point of communion between us: for the title of the old play, 'A Mad 10 World, my Masters,' is hardly yet obsolete; and we are pretty much the same Bedlam still, perhaps a little better managed, like the real one, and with more care and humanity shown to the patients!

Lastly, to conclude this account, what gave a unity and common direction to all these causes was the natural genius of the country, which was strong in these writers in proportion to their strength. We are a nation of islanders, and we cannot help it, nor mend ourselves if we would. We are something in 20 ourselves, nothing when we try to ape others. Music and painting are not our *forte*; for what we have done in that way has been little, and that borrowed from others with great difficulty. But we may boast of our poets and philosophers. That's something. We have had strong heads and sound hearts among us. Thrown on one side of the world, and left to bustle for ourselves, we have fought out many a battle for truth and freedom. That is our natural style; and it were to be wished we had in no instance departed from it. Our 30 situation has given us a certain cast of thought and character; and our liberty has enabled us to make the most of it. We are of a stiff clay, not moulded into

every fashion, with stubborn joints not easily bent. We are slow to think, and therefore impressions do not work upon us till they act in masses. We are not forward to express our feelings, and therefore they do not come from us till they force their way in the most impetuous eloquence. Our language is, as it were, to begin anew, and we make use of the most singular and boldest combinations to explain ourselves. Our wit comes from us "like birdlime, brains and all." We

10 pay too little attention to form and method, leave our works in an unfinished state, but still the materials we work in are solid and of nature's mint; we do not deal in counterfeits. We both under- and over-do, but we keep an eye to the prominent features, the main chance. We are more for weight than show, care only about what interests ourselves, instead of trying to impose upon others by plausible appearances, and are obstinate and intractable in not conforming to

20 common rules, by which many arrive at their ends with half the real waste of thought and trouble. We neglect all but the principal object, gather our force to make a great blow, bring it down, and relapse into sluggishness and indifference again. *Materiam superabat opus* cannot be said of us. We may be accused of grossness, but not of flimsiness; of extravagance, but not of affectation; of want of art and refinement, but not of a want of truth and nature. Our literature, in a word, is Gothic and grotesque, unequal and irregular, not cast in a previous mould, nor of one uni-

30 form texture, but of great weight in the whole, and of incomparable value in the best parts. It aims at an excess of beauty or power, hits or misses, and is either very good indeed or absolutely good for nothing.

This character applies in particular to our literature in the age of Elizabeth, which is its best period, before the introduction of a rage for French rules and French models ; for whatever may be the value of our own original style of composition, there can be neither offence nor presumption in saying that it is at least better than our second-hand imitations of others. Our understanding (such as it is and must remain, to be good for anything) is not a thoroughfare for common places, smooth as the palm of one's hand, but full of 10 knotty points and jutting excrescences, rough, uneven, overgrown with brambles ; and I like this aspect of the mind (as some one said of the country) where nature keeps a good deal of the soil in her own hands. Perhaps the genius of our poetry has more of Pan than of Apollo ; "but Pan is a God, Apollo is no more !"

IV.

SPENSER.

SPENSER, as well as Chaucer, was engaged in active life; but the genius of his poetry was not active: it is inspired by the love of ease and relaxation from all the cares and business of life. Of all the poets he is the most poetical. Though much later than Chaucer, his obligations to preceding writers were less. He has in some measure borrowed the plan of his poem (as a number of distinct narratives) from Ariosto; but he has engrafted upon it an exuberance of fancy and an
 10 endless voluptuousness of sentiment which are not to be found in the Italian writer. Further, Spenser is even more of an inventor in the subject-matter. There is an originality, richness, and variety in his allegorical personages and fictions, which almost vies with the splendour of the ancient mythology. If Ariosto transports us into the regions of romance, Spenser's poetry is all fairyland. In Ariosto, we walk upon the ground, in company gay, fantastic, and adventurous enough. In Spenser, we wander in another world among ideal
 20 beings. The poet takes and lays us in the lap of a lovelier nature, by the sound of softer streams, among greener hills and fairer valleys. He paints nature, not as we find it, but as we expected to find it, and fulfils

the delightful promise of our youth. He waves his wand of enchantment, and at once embodies airy beings, and throws a delicious veil over all actual objects. The two worlds of reality and of fiction are poised on the wings of his imagination. His ideas, indeed, seem more distinct than his perceptions. He is the painter of abstractions, and describes them with dazzling minuteness. In the Mask of Cupid he makes the God of Love "clap on high his coloured winges *twain*"; and it is said of Gluttony in the Procession of the Passions— 10

"In green vine leaves he was right fitly clad."

At times he becomes picturesque from his intense love of beauty, as where he compares Prince Arthur's crest to the appearance of the almond tree—

"Upon the top of all his lofty crest,
 A bunch of hairs discoloured diversely
 With sprinkled pearl and gold full richly drest,
 Did shake and seemed to dance for jollity,
 Like to an almond tree ymounted high 20
 On top of green Selinis all alone,
 With blossoms brave bedecked daintily;
 Whose tender locks do tremble every one
 At every little breath that under heaven is blown."

The love of beauty, however, and not of truth, is the moving principle of his mind; and he is guided in his fantastic delineations by no rule but the impulse of an inexhaustible imagination. He luxuriates equally in scenes of Eastern magnificence or the still solitude of a hermit's cell, in the extremes of sensuality or refinement. 30

In reading the 'Faery Queen,' you see a little withered old man by a wood-side opening a wicket, a

giant, and a dwarf lagging far behind, a damsel in a boat upon an enchanted lake, wood-nymphs, and satyrs ; and all of a sudden you are transported into a lofty palace, with tapers burning, amidst knights and ladies, with dance and revelry, and song, “and mask, and antique pageantry.” What can be more solitary, more shut up in itself, than his description of the House of Sleep, to which Archimago sends for a dream—

- 10 “And more to lull him in his slumber soft,
 A trickling stream from high rock tumbling down,
 And ever-drizzling rain upon the loft,
 Mixed with a murmuring wind, much like the soun
 Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swown.
 No other noise, nor people’s troublous cries,
 As still are wont to annoy the walled town,
 Might there be heard ; but careless quiet lies
 Wrapt in eternal silence far from enemies.”

- It is as if “the honey-heavy dew of slumber” had
 20 settled on his pen in writing these lines. How different in the subject (and yet how like in beauty) is the following description of the Bower of Bliss—

- “Eftsoons they heard a most melodious sound
 Of all that mote delight a dainty ear,
 Such as at once might not on living ground,
 Save in this Paradise, be heard elsewhere :
 Right hard it was for wight which did it hear,
 To read what manner music that mote be ;
 For all that pleasing is to living ear
 30 Was there consorted in one harmony ;
 Birds, voices, instruments, winds, waters, all agree.

 The joyous birds, shrouded in cheerful shade,
 Their notes unto the voice attempered sweet ;
 The angelical soft trembling voices made
 To the instruments divine response meet ;

The silver sounding instruments did meet
 With the base murmur of the water's fall ;
 The water's fall with difference discreet,
 Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call ;
 The gentle warbling wind low answered to all."

The remainder of the passage has all that voluptuous pathos and languid brilliancy of fancy in which this writer excelled.

The finest things in Spenser are : the character of Una in the first book ; the House of Pride, the Cave of Mammon, and the Cave of Despair ; the account of Memory, of whom it is said, among other things—

"The wars he well remembered of King Nine,
 Of old Assaracus and Inachus divine" ;

the description of Belphebe ; the story of Florimel and the Witch's son ; the Gardens of Adonis, and the Bower of Bliss ; the Mask of Cupid ; and Colin Clout's vision in the last book. But some people will say that all this may be very fine, but that they cannot understand it on account of the allegory. They are afraid of the allegory as if they thought it would bite them : they look at it as a child looks at a painted dragon, and think it will strangle them in its shining folds. This is very idle. If they do not meddle with the allegory, the allegory will not meddle with them. Without minding it at all, the whole is as plain as a pike-staff. It might as well be pretended that we cannot see Poussin's pictures for the allegory, as that the allegory prevents us from understanding Spenser. For instance, when Britomart, seated amidst the young warriors, lets fall her hair and discovers her sex, is it necessary to know the part she plays in the allegory to understand the beauty of the following stanza?—

“And eke that stranger knight amongst the rest
 Was for like need enforced to disarray,
 Though, whenas veiled was her lofty crest,
 Her golden locks, that were in trammels gay
 Upbouden, did themselves adown display,
 And raught unto her heels ; like sunny beams,
 That in a cloud their light did long time stay,
 Their vapour vaded, show their golden gleams,
 And through the pesant air shoot forth their azure streams.”

- 10 Or is there any mystery in what is said of Belphebe, that her hair was sprinkled with flowers and blossoms which had been entangled in it as she fled through the woods? Or is it necessary to have a more distinct idea of Proteus than that which is given of him in his boat, with the frightened Florimel at his feet, while

“The cold icicles from his rough beard
 Dropped adown upon her ivory breast”?

Or is it not a sufficient account of one of the sea-gods that pass by them to say—

- 20 “That was Arion crowned ; . . .
 So went he playing on the watery plain”?

Or to take the Procession of the Passions that draw the coach of Pride, in which the figures of Idleness, of Gluttony, of Lechery, of Avarice, of Envy, and of Wrath speak, one should think, plain enough for themselves ; such as this of Gluttony—

- 30 “And by his side rode loathsome Gluttony,
 Deformed creature, on a filthy swine ;
 His belly was upblown with luxury,
 And eke with fatness swollen were his eyne ;
 And like a crane his neck was long and fine,
 With which he swallowed up excessive feast,
 For want whereof poor people oft did pine.”

In green vine leaves he was right fitly clad,
 For other clothes he could not wear for heat ;
 And on his head an ivy garland had,
 From under which fast trickled down the sweat :
 Still as he rode he somewhat still did eat,
 And in his hand did bear a boozing can,
 Of which he supped so oft that on his seat
 His drunken corse he scarce upholden can :
 In shape and life more like a monster than a man."

Or this of Lechery—

10

"And next to him rode lustful Lechery
 Upon a bearded goat, whose rugged hair
 And whaly eyes (the sign of jealousy)
 Was like the person's self whom he did bear :
 Who rough and black and filthy did appear ;
 Unseemly man to please fair lady's eye :
 Yet he of ladies oft was loved dear,
 When fairer faces were bid standen by :
 O ! who does know the bent of women's fantasies ?

In a green gown he clothed was full fair,
 Which underneath did hide his filthiness ;
 And in his hand a burning heart he bare,
 Full of vain follies and new-fangleness ;
 For he was false, and fraught with fickleness,
 And learned had to love with secret looks,
 And well could dance, and sing with ruefulness,
 And fortunes tell, and read in loving books,
 And thousand other ways to bait his fleshly hooks.

20

Inconstant man, that loved all he saw,
 And lusted after all that he did love ;
 Ne would his looser life be tied to law,
 But joyed weak women's hearts to tempt, and prove
 If from their loyal loves he might them move."

30

This is pretty plain-spoken. Mr Southey says of Spenser—

"Yet not more sweet
 Than pure was he, and not more pure than wise,
 High Priest of all the Muses' mysteries."

On the contrary, no one was more apt to pry into mysteries which do not strictly belong to the Muses.

In reading these descriptions, one can hardly avoid being reminded of Rubens's allegorical pictures; but the account of Satyrane's taming the lion's whelps and lugging the bear's cubs along in his arms while yet an infant, whom his mother so naturally advises to "go find some other play-fellows," has even more of this high picturesque character. Nobody but Rubens could
10 have painted the fancy of Spenser; and he could not have given the sentiment, the airy dream, that hovers over it!

With all this, Spenser neither makes us laugh nor weep. The only jest in his poem is an allegorical play upon words, where he describes Malbecco as escaping in the herd of goats, "through the help of his fair horns on height." But he has been unjustly charged with a want of passion and of strength. He has both in an immense degree. He has not indeed the pathos
20 of immediate action or suffering, which is more properly the dramatic, but he has all the pathos of sentiment and romance, all that belongs to distant objects of terror and uncertain, imaginary distress. His strength, in like manner, is not strength of will or action, of bone and muscle, nor is it coarse and palpable; but it assumes a character of vastness and sublimity seen through the same visionary medium, and blended with the appalling associations of preternatural agency. We need only turn, in proof of this, to the Cave of Despair,
30 or the Cave of Mammon, or to the account of the change of Malbecco into Jealousy. The following stanzas, in the description of the Cave of Mammon, the grisly house of Plutus, are unrivalled for the por-

tentous massiness of the forms, the splendid chiaroscuro, and shadowy horror—

“That house’s form within was rude and strong,
 Like an huge cave hewn out of rocky clift,
 From whose rough vault the ragged breaches hung
 Embossed with massy gold of glorious gift,
 And with rich metal loaded every rift,
 That heavy ruin they did seem to threat ;
 And over them Arachne high did lift
 Her cunning web, and spread her subtle net, 10
 Enwrapped in foul smoke and clouds more black than jet.

Both roof and floor and walls were all of gold,
 But overgrown with dust and old decay,¹
 And hid in darkness, that none could behold
 The hue thereof ; for view of cheerful day
 Did never in that house itself display,
 But a faint shadow of uncertain light ;
 Such as a lamp whose light doth fade away,
 Or as the moon, clothed with cloudy night,
 Does show to him that walks in fear and sad affright. 20

.
 And over them sad Horror with grim hue
 Did always soar, beating his iron wings ;
 And after him owls and night-ravens flew,
 The hateful messengers of heavy things,
 Of death and dolour telling sad tidings ;
 Whiles sad Celeno, sitting on a clift,
 A song of bale and bitter sorrow sings,
 That heart of flint asunder could have rift ;
 Which having ended, after him she flieth swift.”

The Cave of Despair is described with equal gloominess 30
 and power of fancy ; and the fine moral declamation of

¹ “That all with one consent praise new-born gauds,
 Tho’ they are made and moulded of things past,
 And give to Dust that is a little gilt
 More laud than gilt o’er-dusted.”

—‘Troilus and Cressida.’

the owner of it on the evils of life almost makes one in love with death. In the story of Malbecco, who is hunted by Jealousy, and in vain strives to run away from his own thoughts—

“High over hills and over dales he fled”—

the truth of human passion and the preternatural ending are equally striking. It is not fair to compare Spenser with Shakespeare in point of interest. A fairer comparison would be with Comus; and the result would
10 not be unfavourable to Spenser. There is only one work of the same allegorical kind which has more interest than Spenser (with scarcely less imagination), and that is the ‘Pilgrim’s Progress.’ The three first books of the ‘Faery Queen’ are very superior to the three last. One would think that Pope, who used to ask if any one had ever read the ‘Faery Queen’ through, had only dipped into these last. The only things in them equal to the former are the account of Talus, the Iron Man, and the delightful episode of
20 Pastorella.

The language of Spenser is full and copious to overflowing: it is less pure and idiomatic than Chaucer’s, and is enriched and adorned with phrases borrowed from the different languages of Europe, both ancient and modern. He was probably seduced into a certain licence of expression by the difficulty of filling up the moulds of his complicated rhymed stanza from the limited resources of his native language. This stanza,
30 with alternate and repeatedly recurring rhymes, is borrowed from the Italians. It was peculiarly fitted to their language, which abounds in similar vowel terminations, and is as little adapted to ours, from the

stubborn, unaccommodating resistance which the consonant endings of the northern languages make to this sort of endless sing-song. Not that I would on that account part with the stanza of Spenser. We are perhaps indebted to this very necessity of finding out new forms of expression, and to the occasional faults to which it led, for a poetical language rich and varied and magnificent beyond all former, and almost all later, example. His versification is at once the most smooth and the most sounding in the language. It is a labyrinth of sweet sounds, in "many a winding bout of linked sweetness long drawn out," that would cloy by their very sweetness, but that the ear is constantly relieved and enchanted by their continued variety of modulation, dwelling on the pauses of the action, or flowing on in a fuller tide of harmony with the movement of the sentiment. It has not the bold dramatic transitions of Shakespeare's blank verse, nor the high-raised tone of Milton's, but it is the perfection of melting harmony, dissolving the soul in pleasure, or holding it captive in the chains of suspense. Spenser was the poet of our waking dreams; and he has invented not only a language but a music of his own for them. The undulations are infinite, like those of the waves of the sea; but the effect is still the same, lulling the senses into a deep oblivion of the jarring noises of the world, from which we have no wish to be ever recalled.

V.

SHAKESPEARE.

IN looking back to the great works of genius in former times, we are sometimes disposed to wonder at the little progress which has since been made in poetry, and in the arts of imitation in general. But this is perhaps a foolish wonder. Nothing can be more contrary to the fact than the supposition that in what we understand by the *fine arts*, as painting and poetry, relative perfection is the result only of repeated efforts in successive periods, and that what has been once
 10 well done constantly leads to something better. What is mechanical, reducible to rule, or capable of demonstration, is progressive, and admits of gradual improvement: what is not mechanical, or definite, but depends on feeling, taste, and genius, very soon becomes stationary or retrograde, and loses more than it gains by transfusion. The contrary opinion is a vulgar error which has grown up, like many others, from transferring an analogy of one kind to something quite distinct, without taking into the account the difference
 20 in the nature of the things, or attending to the difference of the results. For most persons, finding what wonderful advances have been made in biblical criticism, in chemistry, in mechanics, in geometry, astron-

omy, &c.—*i.e.*, in things depending on mere inquiry and experiment, or on absolute demonstration—have been led hastily to conclude that there was a general tendency in the efforts of the human intellect to improve by repetition, and, in all other arts and institutions, to grow perfect and mature by time. We look back upon the theological creed of our ancestors and their discoveries in natural philosophy with a smile of pity: science and the arts connected with it have all had their infancy, their youth, and manhood, and seem to contain in them no principle of limitation or decay; and, inquiring no further about the matter, we infer in the intoxication of our pride and the height of our self-congratulation that the same progress has been made, and will continue to be made, in all other things which are the work of man. The fact, however, stares us so plainly in the face that one would think the smallest reflection must suggest the truth and overturn our sanguine theories. The greatest poets, the ablest orators, the best painters, and the finest sculptors that the world ever saw, appeared soon after the birth of these arts, and lived in a state of society which was, in other respects, comparatively barbarous. Those arts which depend on individual genius and incommunicable power, have always leaped at once from infancy to manhood, from the first rude dawn of invention to their meridian height and dazzling lustre, and have in general declined ever after. This is the peculiar distinction and privilege of each, of science and of art: of the one, never to attain its utmost limit of perfection; and of the other, to arrive at it almost at once. Homer, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Dante, and Ariosto (Milton alone was

of a later age, and not the worse for it); Raphael, Titian, Michael Angelo, Correggio; Cervantes and Boccaccio; the Greek sculptors and tragedians,—all lived near the beginning of their arts, perfected and all but created them. These giant-sons of genius stand indeed upon the earth, but they tower above their fellows; and the long line of their successors, in different ages, does not interpose any object to obstruct their view or lessen their brightness. In
10 strength and stature they are unrivalled; in grace and beauty they have not been surpassed. In after ages and more refined periods (as they are called) great men have arisen, one by one, as it were, by throes and at intervals; though in general the best of these cultivated and artificial minds were of an inferior order, as Tasso and Pope among poets, Guido and Vandyke among painters. But in the earlier stages of the arts, as soon as the first mechanical difficulties had been got over and the language was
20 sufficiently acquired, they rose by clusters and in constellations, never so to rise again!

The arts of painting and poetry are conversant with the world of thought within us, and with the world of sense around us—with what we know, and see, and feel intimately. They flow from the sacred shrine of our own breasts, and are kindled at the living lamp of nature. But the pulse of the passions assuredly beats as high; the depths and soundings of the human heart were as well understood three thousand or three hun-
30 dred years ago as they are at present: the face of nature and “the human face divine” shone as bright then as they have ever done. But it is *their* light, reflected by true genius on art, that marks out its path

before it, and sheds a glory round the Muses' feet,
like that which circled Una's "angel's face,"

"And made a sunshine in the shady place."

The four greatest names in English poetry are almost the four first we come to: Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. There are no others that can really be put in competition with these. The two last have had justice done them by the voice of common fame. Their names are blazoned in the very firmament of reputation, while the two first (though 10
"the fault has been more in their stars than in themselves that they are underlings") either never emerged far above the horizon, or were too soon involved in the obscurity of time. The three first of these are excluded from Dr Johnson's 'Lives of the Poets' (Shakespeare indeed is so from the dramatic form of his compositions); and the fourth, Milton, is admitted with a reluctant and churlish welcome.

In comparing these four writers together, it might be said that Chaucer excels as the poet of manners 20
or of real life; Spenser, as the poet of romance; Shakespeare, as the poet of nature (in the largest use of the term); and Milton, as the poet of morality. Chaucer most frequently describes things as they are; Spenser, as we wish them to be; Shakespeare, as they would be; and Milton, as they ought to be. As poets, and as great poets, imagination—that is, the power of feigning things according to nature—was common to them all; but the principle or moving power to which 30
this faculty was most subservient in Chaucer was habit or inveterate prejudice; in Spenser, novelty and the love of the marvellous; in Shakespeare, it was the

force of passion, combined with every variety of possible circumstances ; and in Milton, only with the highest. The characteristic of Chaucer is intensity ; of Spenser, remoteness ; of Milton, elevation ; of Shakespeare, everything. It has been said by some critic that Shakespeare was distinguished from the other dramatic writers of his day only by his wit ; that they had all his other qualities but that ; that one writer had as much sense, another as much fancy, another
10 as much knowledge of character, another the same depth of passion, and another as great a power of language. This statement is not true ; nor is the inference from it well-founded even if it were. This person does not seem to have been aware that, upon his own showing, the great distinction of Shakespeare's genius was its virtually including the genius of all the great men of his age, and not his differing from them in one accidental particular. But to have done with such minute and literal trifling.

20 The striking peculiarity of Shakespeare's mind was its generic quality, its power of communication with all other minds, so that it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one peculiar bias or exclusive excellence more than another. He was just like any other man, but that he was like all other men. He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself ; but he was all that others were, or that they could become. He not only had in himself
30 the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune, or conflict of passion, or turn of thought.

He had "a mind reflecting ages past" and present : all the people that ever lived are there. There was no respect of persons with him. His genius shone equally on the evil and on the good, on the wise and on the foolish, the monarch and the beggar. "All corners of the world, kings, queens, and states, maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave," are hardly hid from his searching glance. He was like the genius of humanity, changing places with all of us at pleasure, and playing with our purposes as with his own. He 10 turned the globe round for his amusement, and surveyed the generations of men and the individuals as they passed with their different concerns, passions, follies, vices, virtues, actions, and motives—as well those that they knew as those which they did not know, or acknowledge to themselves. The dreams of childhood, the ravings of despair, were the toys of his fancy. Airy beings waited at his call and came at his bidding. Harmless fairies "nodded to him, and did him courtesies"; and the night-hag bestrode 20 the blast at the command of his "so potent art." The world of spirits lay open to him like the world of real men and women ; and there is the same truth in his delineations of the one as of the other ; for if the preternatural characters he describes could be supposed to exist, they would speak, and feel, and act, as he makes them. He had only to think of anything in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it. When he conceived of a character, whether real or imaginary, he not only 30 entered into all its thoughts and feelings, but seemed instantly, and as if by touching a secret spring, to be surrounded with all the same objects, "subject to the

same skyey influences," the same local, outward, and unforeseen accidents which would occur in reality. Thus the character of Caliban not only stands before us with a language and manners of its own, but the scenery and situation of the enchanted island he inhabits, the traditions of the place, its strange noises, its hidden recesses, "his frequent haunts and ancient neighbourhood," are given with a miraculous truth of nature and with all the familiarity of an old recollection. The whole "coheres semblably together" in time, place, and circumstance. In reading this author, you do not merely learn what his characters say: you see their persons. By something expressed or understood, you are at no loss to decipher their peculiar physiognomy, the meaning of a look, the grouping, the by-play, as we might see it on the stage. A word, an epithet, paints a whole scene, or throws us back whole years in the history of the person represented. So (as it has been ingeniously remarked) when Prospero describes himself as left alone in the boat with his daughter, the epithet which he applies to her, "Me and thy *crying* self," flings the imagination instantly back from the grown woman to the helpless condition of infancy, and places the first and most trying scene of his misfortunes before us with all that he must have suffered in the interval. How well the silent anguish of Macduff is conveyed to the reader by the friendly expostulation of Malcolm: "What! man, ne'er pull your hat upon your brows!" Again, Hamlet, in the scene with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, somewhat abruptly concludes his fine soliloquy on life by saying: "Man delights not me, nor woman neither, though by your smiles you seem to say so." Which

is explained by their answer : “ My lord, we had no such stuff in our thoughts. But we smiled to think, if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you, whom we met on the way ;” as if, while Hamlet was making this speech, his two old schoolfellows from Wittenburg had been really standing by, and he had seen them smiling by stealth at the idea of the players crossing their minds. It is not “ a combination and a form ” of words, a set speech or two, a preconcerted theory 10 of a character, that will do this ; but all the persons concerned must have been present in the poet’s imagination, as at a kind of rehearsal ; and whatever would have passed through their minds on the occasion, and have been observed by others, passed through his, and is made known to the reader. I may add in passing that Shakespeare always gives the best directions for the costume and carriage of his heroes. Thus, to take one example, Ophelia gives the following account of Hamlet ; and as Ophelia had 20 seen Hamlet, I should think her word ought to be taken against that of any modern authority.

“ *Ophelia.* My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
 Prince Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced,
 No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
 Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ancle,
 Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
 And with a look so piteous in purport,
 As if he had been loosed out of hell
 To speak of horrors,—he comes before me.

30

Polonius. Mad for thy love ?

Oph.

My lord, I do not know,

But truly I do fear it.

Pol.

What said he ?

Oph. He took me by the wrist and held me hard ;

Then goes he to the length of all his arm ;
 And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
 He falls to such perusal of my face,
 As he would draw it. Long staid he so ;
 At last, a little shaking of mine arm,
 And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
 He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
 As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
 And end his being. That done, he lets me go :
 10 And, with his head over his shoulder turned,
 He seemed to find his way without his eyes ;
 For out of doors he went without their helps,
 And to the last bended their light on me."

How, after this airy, fantastic idea of irregular grace
 and bewildered melancholy, any one can play Hamlet,
 as we have seen it played, with strut, and stare, and
 antic right-angled, sharp-pointed gestures, it is diffi-
 cult to say, unless it be that Hamlet is not bound,
 by the prompter's cue, to study the part of Ophelia.
 20 The account of Ophelia's death begins thus—

"There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
 That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream."

Now this is an instance of the same unconscious
 power of mind which is as true to nature as itself.
 The leaves of the willow are, in fact, white underneath,
 and it is this part of them which would appear
 "hoar" in the reflection in the brook. The same
 sort of intuitive power, the same faculty of bringing
 every object in nature, whether present or absent,
 30 before the mind's eye, is observable in the speech of
 Cleopatra, when conjecturing what were the employ-
 ments of Antony in his absence : "He's speaking now,
 or murmuring, Where's my serpent of old Nile?"
 How fine to make Cleopatra have this consciousness

of her own character, and to make her feel that it is this for which Antony is in love with her! She says, after the battle of Actium, when Antony has resolved to risk another fight: "It is my birthday: I had thought to have held it poor; but since my lord is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra." What other poet would have thought of such a casual resource of the imagination, or would have dared to avail himself of it? The thing happens in the play as it might have happened in fact. That which, perhaps more than 10 anything else, distinguishes the dramatic productions of Shakespeare from all others is this wonderful truth and individuality of conception. Each of his characters is as much itself, and as absolutely independent of the rest, as well as of the author, as if they were living persons, not fictions of the mind. The poet may be said, for the time, to identify himself with the character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to another like the same soul successively animating different bodies. By an art like that of 20 the ventriloquist, he throws his imagination out of himself, and makes every word appear to proceed from the mouth of the person in whose name it is given. His plays alone are properly expressions of the passions, not descriptions of them. His characters are real beings of flesh and blood: they speak like men, not like authors. One might suppose that he had stood by at the time and overheard what passed. As in our dreams we hold conversations with ourselves, make remarks, or communicate intelligence, and have 30 no idea of the answer which we shall receive and which we ourselves make till we hear it, so the dialogues in Shakespeare are carried on without any

consciousness of what is to follow, without any appearance of preparation or premeditation. The gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind. Nothing is made out by formal inference and analogy, by climax and antithesis: all comes, or seems to come, immediately from nature. Each object and circumstance exists in his mind, as it would have existed in reality: each several train of thought and feeling goes on of itself, without confusion
16 or effort. In the world of his imagination, everything has a life, a place, and being of its own!

Chaucer's characters are sufficiently distinct from one another, but they are too little varied in themselves, too much like identical propositions. They are consistent, but uniform; we get no new idea of them from first to last; they are not placed in different lights, nor are their subordinate traits brought out in new situations; they are like portraits or physiognomical studies with the distinguishing features marked
20 with inconceivable truth and precision, but that preserve the same unaltered air and attitude. Shakespeare's are historical figures, equally true and correct, but put into action where every nerve and muscle is displayed in the struggle with others, with all the effect of collision and contrast, with every variety of light and shade. Chaucer's characters are narrative, Shakespeare's dramatic, Milton's epic. That is, Chaucer told only as much of his story as he pleased, as was required for a particular purpose. He answered
30 for his characters himself. In Shakespeare they are introduced upon the stage, are liable to be asked all sorts of questions, and are forced to answer for themselves. In Chaucer we perceive a fixed essence of

character. In Shakespeare there is a continual composition and decomposition of its elements, a fermentation of every particle in the whole mass, by its alternate affinity or antipathy to other principles which are brought in contact with it. Till the experiment is tried, we do not know the result, the turn which the character will take in its new circumstances. Milton took only a few simple principles of character, and raised them to the utmost conceivable grandeur, and refined them from every base alloy. His imagination, "nigh sphered in Heaven," claimed kindred only with what he saw from that height, and could raise to the same elevation with itself. He sat retired and kept his state alone, "playing with wisdom"; while Shakespeare mingled with the crowd, and played the host "to make society the sweeter welcome."

The passion in Shakespeare is of the same nature as his delineation of character. It is not some one habitual feeling or sentiment preying upon itself, growing out of itself, and moulding everything to itself: it is passion modified by passion, by all the other feelings to which the individual is liable, and to which others are liable with him; subject to all the fluctuations of caprice and accident; calling into play all the resources of the understanding and all the energies of the will; irritated by obstacles or yielding to them; rising from small beginnings to its utmost height; now drunk with hope, now stung to madness, now sunk in despair, now blown to air with a breath, now raging like a torrent. The human soul is made the sport of fortune, the prey of adversity: it is stretched on the wheel of destiny in restless ecstasy. The passions are in a state of projection. Years are melted

down to moments, and every instant teems with fate. We know the results, we see the process. Thus after Iago has been boasting to himself of the effect of his poisonous suggestions on the mind of Othello, "which, with a little act upon the blood, burn like the mines of sulphur," he adds—

"Look where he comes ! Not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou owedst yesterday."

10

And he enters at this moment, like the crested serpent, crowned with his wrongs and raging for revenge ! The whole depends upon the turn of a thought. A word, a look, blows the spark of jealousy into a flame, and the explosion is immediate and terrible as a volcano. The dialogues in 'Lear,' in 'Macbeth,' that between Brutus and Cassius, and nearly all those in Shakespeare, where the interest is wrought up to its highest pitch, afford examples of this dramatic fluctuation of
20 passion. The interest in Chaucer is quite different : it is like the course of a river, strong, and full, and increasing. In Shakespeare, on the contrary, it is like the sea, agitated this way and that, and loud-lashed by furious storms ; while in the still pauses of the blast we distinguish only the cries of despair or the silence of death ! Milton, on the other hand, takes the imaginative part of passion—that which remains after the event, which the mind reposes on when all is over, which looks upon circumstances from the remotest
30 elevation of thought and fancy, and abstracts them from the world of action to that of contemplation. The objects of dramatic poetry affect us by sympathy, by their nearness to ourselves, as they take us by

surprise, or force us upon action, while "rage with rage doth sympathise": the objects of epic poetry affect us through the medium of the imagination, by magnitude and distance, by their permanence and universality. The one fills us with terror and pity, the other with admiration and delight. There are certain objects that strike the imagination and inspire awe in the very idea of them, independently of any dramatic interest—that is, of any connection with the vicissitudes of human life. For instance, we cannot 10 think of the pyramids of Egypt, of a Gothic ruin, or an old Roman encampment, without a certain emotion, a sense of power and sublimity coming over the mind. The heavenly bodies that hang over our heads wherever we go, and "in their untroubled element shall shine when we are laid in dust, and all our cares forgotten," affect us in the same way. Thus Satan's address to the Sun has an epic, not a dramatic interest; for though the second person in the dialogue makes no answer and feels no concern, yet the eye 20 of that vast luminary is upon him, like the eye of Heaven, and seems conscious of what he says, like an universal presence. Dramatic poetry and epic in their perfection, indeed, approximate to and strengthen one another. Dramatic poetry borrows aid from the dignity of persons and things as the heroic does from human passion, but in theory they are distinct. When Richard II. calls for the looking-glass to contemplate his faded majesty in it, and bursts into that affecting exclamation: "Oh that I were a 30 mockery king of snow, to melt away before the sun of Bolingbroke," we have here the utmost force of human passion, combined with the ideas of regal

splendour and fallen power. When Milton says of Satan—

“ His form had not yet lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than archangel ruined, and the excess
Of glory obscured,”

the mixture of beauty, of grandeur, and pathos, from the sense of irreparable loss, of never-ending, unavailing regret, is perfect.

- 10 The great fault of a modern school of poetry is that it is an experiment to reduce poetry to a mere effusion of natural sensibility ; or, what is worse, to divest it both of imaginary splendour and human passion, to surround the meanest objects with the morbid feelings and devouring egotism of the writers' own minds. Milton and Shakespeare did not so understand poetry. They gave a more liberal interpretation both to nature and art. They did not do all they could to get rid of the one and the other,
- 20 to fill up the dreary void with the moods of their own minds. They owe their power over the human mind to their having had a deeper sense than others of what was grand in the objects of nature, or affecting in the events of human life. But to the men I speak of there is nothing interesting, nothing heroical, but themselves. To them the fall of gods or of great men is the same. They do not enter into the feeling. They cannot understand the terms. They are even debarred from the last poor, paltry consolation of an
- 30 unmanly triumph over fallen greatness ; for their minds reject, with a convulsive effort and intolerable loathing, the very idea that there ever was, or was thought to be, anything superior to themselves. All that has ever excited the attention or admiration of the world they

look upon with the most perfect indifference; and they are surprised to find that the world repays their indifference with scorn. "With what measure they mete, it has been meted to them again."

Shakespeare's imagination is of the same plastic kind as his conception of character or passion. "It glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven." Its movement is rapid and devious. It unites the most opposite extremes; or, as Puck says, in boasting of his own feats, "puts a girdle round about the earth 10 in forty minutes." He seems always hurrying from his subject, even while describing it; but the stroke, like the lightning's, is sure as it is sudden. He takes the widest possible range, but from that very range he has his choice of the greatest variety and aptitude of materials. He brings together images the most alike, but placed at the greatest distance from each other—that is, found in circumstances of the greatest dissimilitude. From the remoteness of his combinations, and the celerity with which they are effected, 20 they coalesce the more indissolubly together. The more the thoughts are strangers to each other, and the longer they have been kept asunder, the more intimate does their union seem to become. Their felicity is equal to their force. Their likeness is made more dazzling by their novelty. They startle and take the fancy prisoner in the same instant. I will mention one or two which are very striking, and not much known, out of 'Troilus and Cressida.' Æneas says to Agamemnon—

30

"I ask that I may waken reverence,
And bid the cheek be ready with a blush
Modest as morning when she coldly eyes
The youthful Phœbus."

Ulysses, urging Achilles to show himself in the field, says—

“ No man is the lord of any thing, . . .
 Till he communicate his parts to others :
 Nor doth he of himself know them for aught
 Till he behold them formed in the applause
 Where they're extended ; who like an arch reverberates
 The voice again, or, like a gate of steel
 Fronting the sun, receives and renders back
 His figure and his heat.”

10

Patroclus gives the indolent warrior the same advice—

“ Rouse yourself ; and the weak wanton Cupid
 Shall from your neck unloose his amorous fold,
 And, like a dew-drop from the lion's mane,
 Be shook to air.”

Shakespeare's language and versification are like the rest of him. He has a magic power over words : they come winged at his bidding, and seem to know their places. They are struck out at a heat on the
 20 spur of the occasion, and have all the truth and vividness which arise from an actual impression of the objects. His epithets and single phrases are like sparkles, thrown off from an imagination fired by the whirling rapidity of its own motion. His language is hieroglyphical. It translates thoughts into visible images. It abounds in sudden transitions and elliptical expressions. This is the source of his mixed metaphors, which are only abbreviated forms of speech. These, however, give no pain from long custom.
 30 They have, in fact, become idioms in the language. They are the building and not the scaffolding to thought. We take the meaning and effect of a well-known passage entire, and no more stop to scan and

spell out the particular words and phrases than the syllables of which they are composed. In trying to recollect any other author, one sometimes stumbles, in case of failure, on a word as good. In Shakespeare, any other word but the true one is sure to be wrong. If anybody, for instance, could not recollect the words of the following description—

“Light thickens ; and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood,”

he would be greatly at a loss to substitute others for 10
them equally expressive of the feeling. These remarks, however, are strictly applicable only to the impassioned parts of Shakespeare's language, which flowed from the warmth and originality of his imagination, and were his own. The language used for prose conversation and ordinary business is sometimes technical and involved in the affectation of the time. Compare, for example, Othello's apology to the Senate relating “his whole course of love” with some of the 20
preceding parts relating to his appointment and the official dispatches from Cyprus. In this respect, “the business of the state does him offence.” His versification is no less powerful, sweet, and varied. It has every occasional excellence, of sullen intricacy crabbed and perplexed, or of the smoothest and loftiest expansion, from the ease and familiarity of measured conversation to the lyrical sounds

“Of ditties highly penned,
Sung by a fair queen in a summer's bower,
With ravishing division, to her lute.”

30

It is the only blank verse in the language except Milton's that for itself is readable. It is not stately

and uniformly swelling like his, but varied and broken by the inequalities of the ground it has to pass over in its uncertain course,—

“ And so by many winding nooks it strays,
With willing sport to the wild ocean.”

It remains to speak of the faults of Shakespeare. They are not so many or so great as they have been represented ; what there are, are chiefly owing to the following causes : The universality of his genius was,
10 perhaps, a disadvantage to his single works, the variety of his resources sometimes diverting him from applying them to the most effectual purposes. He might be said to combine the powers of *Æschylus* and *Aristophanes*, of *Dante* and *Rabelais*, in his own mind. If he had been only half what he was, he would perhaps have appeared greater. The natural ease and indifference of his temper made him sometimes less scrupulous than he might have been. He is relaxed and careless in critical places : he is in earnest
20 throughout only in ‘*Timon*,’ ‘*Macbeth*,’ and ‘*Lear*.’ Again, he had no models of acknowledged excellence constantly in view to stimulate his efforts, and, by all that appears, no love of fame. He wrote for the “great vulgar and the small” in his time, not for posterity. If *Queen Elizabeth* and the maids of honour laughed heartily at his worst jokes, and the catcalls in the gallery were silent at his best passages, he went home satisfied and slept the next night well. He did not trouble himself about *Voltaire*’s criticisms.
30 He was willing to take advantage of the ignorance of the age in many things, and, if his plays pleased others, not to quarrel with them himself. His very facility

of production would make him set less value on his own excellences, and not care to distinguish nicely between what he did well or ill. His blunders in chronology and geography do not amount to above half a dozen, and they are offences against chronology and geography, not against poetry. As to the unities, he was right in setting them at defiance. He was fonder of puns than became so great a man. His barbarisms were those of his age. His genius was his own. He had no objection to float down with the 10 stream of common taste and opinion : he rose above it by his own buoyancy and an impulse which he could not keep under, in spite of himself or others, and "his delights did show most dolphin-like."

He had an equal genius for comedy and tragedy ; and his tragedies are better than his comedies, because tragedy is better than comedy. His female characters, which have been found fault with as insipid, are the finest in the world. Lastly, Shakespeare was the least of a coxcomb of any one that ever lived, and much 20 of a gentleman.

VI.

MILTON.

SHAKESPEARE discovers in his writings little religious enthusiasm, and an indifference to personal reputation ; he had none of the bigotry of his age, and his political prejudices were not very strong. In these respects, as well as in every other, he formed a direct contrast to Milton. Milton's works are a perpetual invocation to the Muses, a hymn to Fame. He had his thoughts constantly fixed on the contemplation of the Hebrew theocracy, and of a perfect commonwealth ; and he
 10 seized the pen with a hand just warm from the touch of the ark of faith. His religious zeal infused its character into his imagination, so that he devotes himself with the same sense of duty to the cultivation of his genius as he did to the exercise of virtue or the good of his country. The spirit of the poet, the patriot, and the prophet vied with each other in his breast. His mind appears to have held equal communion with the inspired writers, and with the bards and sages of ancient Greece and Rome,—

20

“ Blind Thamyris and blind Mæonides,
 And Tiresias and Phineus, prophets old.”

He had a high standard with which he was always

comparing himself, nothing short of which could satisfy his jealous ambition.

“Sad task ! yet argument
Not less but more heroic than the wrath
Of stern Achilles on his foe pursued . . .
If answerable style I can obtain.
. . . Unless an age too late, or cold
Climate, or years, damp my extended wing.”

He thought of nobler forms and nobler things than those he found about him. He lived apart in the solitude of his own thoughts, carefully excluding from his mind whatever might distract its purposes, or alloy its purity, or damp its zeal. “In darkness and with dangers compassed round,” he had the mighty models of antiquity always present to his thoughts, and determined to raise a monument of equal height and glory, “piling up every stone of lustre from the brook,” for the delight and wonder of posterity. He had girded himself up, and, as it were, sanctified his genius to this service from his youth. “For after,” he says, “I had for my first years, by the ceaseless diligence and care of my father, been exercised to the tongues, and some sciences, as my age would suffer, by sundry masters and teachers, it was found that whether aught was imposed me by them, or betaken to of my own choice, the style, by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live. But much latelier, in the private academies of Italy, perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty or thereabout, met with acceptance above what was looked for, I began thus far to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home, and not less to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and

intense study (which I take to be my portion in this life), joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to after-times as they should not willingly let it die. . . . The accomplishment of these intentions, which have lived within me ever since I could conceive myself anything worth to my country, lies not but in a power above man's to promise; but that none hath by more studious ways endeavoured, and with more
10 unwearied spirit that none shall, that I dare almost aver of myself, as far as life and free leisure will extend. Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader that for some few years yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth or the vapours of wine, like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amorist or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite; nor to be obtained by the in-
20 vocation of Dame memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out His Seraphim with the hallowed fire of His altar to touch and purify the lips of whom He pleases: to this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, and insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs. Although it nothing content me to have disclosed thus much beforehand, but that I trust hereby to make it manifest with what small willingness
30 I endure to interrupt the pursuit of no less hopes than these, and leave a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes, put from

beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies."

So that of Spenser—

"The noble heart that harbours virtuous thought,
And is with child of glorious great intent,
Can never rest until it forth hath brought
The eternal brood of glory excellent."

Milton, therefore, did not write from casual impulse, but after a severe examination of his own strength, and with a resolution to leave nothing undone which it was 10 in his power to do. He always labours, and almost always succeeds. He strives hard to say the finest things in the world, and he does say them. He adorns and dignifies his subject to the utmost; he surrounds it with every possible association of beauty or grandeur, whether moral, intellectual, or physical. He refines on his descriptions of beauty, loading sweets on sweets, till the sense aches at them, and raises his images of terror to a gigantic elevation that "makes Ossa like a wart." In Milton there is always an appearance of effort: in 20 Shakespeare, scarcely any.

Milton has borrowed more than any other writer, and exhausted every source of imitation, sacred or profane; yet he is perfectly distinct from every other writer. He is a writer of centos, and yet in originality scarcely inferior to Homer. The power of his mind is stamped on every line. The fervour of his imagination melts down and renders malleable, as in a furnace, the most contradictory materials. In reading his works we feel ourselves under the influence of a mighty intellect that, 30 the nearer it approaches to others, becomes more distinct from them. The quantity of art in him shows the strength of his genius: the weight of his intellectual

obligations would have oppressed any other writer. Milton's learning has all the effect of intuition. He describes objects of which he could only have read in books with the vividness of actual observation. His imagination has the force of nature. He makes words tell as pictures—

“Him followed Rimmon, whose delightful seat
Was fair Damascus, on the fertile banks
Of Abbana and Pharphar, lucid streams.”

- 10 The word *lucid* here gives to the idea all the sparkling effect of the most perfect landscape.

And again—

“As when a vulture, on Imaus bred,
Whose snowy ridge the roving Tartar bounds,
Dislodging from a region scarce of prey,
To gorge the flesh of lambs and yeanning kids
On hills where flocks are fed, *flies towards the springs*
Of Ganges or Hydaspes, Indian streams,
But in his way lights on the barren plains
20 *Of Sericana, where Chinese drive*
With sails and wind their cany waggons light.”

If Milton had taken a journey for the express purpose, he could not have described this scenery and mode of life better. Such passages are like demonstrations of natural history. Instances might be multiplied without end.

- There is also a decided tone in his descriptions, an eloquent dogmatism, as if the poet spoke from thorough conviction, which Milton probably derived from his
30 spirit of partisanship, or else his spirit of partisanship from the natural firmness and vehemence of his mind. In this Milton resembles Dante (the only one of the moderns with whom he has anything in common), and

it is remarkable that Dante, as well as Milton, was a political partisan. That approximation to the severity of impassioned prose, which has been made an objection to Milton's poetry, is one of its chief excellencies.

We might be tempted to suppose that the vividness with which he describes visible objects was owing to their having acquired an unusual degree of strength in his mind after the privation of his sight; but we find the same palpableness and truth in the descriptions 10 which occur in his early poems. In 'Lycidas,' he speaks of "the great vision of the guarded mount" with that preternatural weight of impression with which it would present itself suddenly to "the pilot of some small night-foundered skiff"; and the lines in the 'Penseroso,' describing "the wandering moon

Riding near her highest noon,
Like one that had been led astray
Through the heaven's wide pathless way,"

are as if he had gazed himself blind in looking at her. 20 There is also the same depth of impression in his descriptions of the objects of all the different senses, whether colours, or sounds, or smells—the same absorption of his mind in whatever engaged his attention at the time. Milton had as much of what is meant by *gusto* as any poet.¹ He forms the most intense conception of things, and then embodies them by a single stroke of his pen. He has an inveterate attachment

¹ The infinite quantity of dramatic invention in Shakespeare takes from his *gusto*. The power he delights to show is not intense but discursive. He never insists on anything as much as he might except a quibble.

to the objects he describes and to the words describing them—

“ Wild above rule or art, *enormous* bliss.”

It has been indeed objected to Milton, by a common perversity of criticism, that his ideas were musical rather than picturesque, as if, because they were in the highest degree musical, they must be (to keep the sage critical balance even, and to allow no one man to possess two qualities at the same time) proportionably
10 deficient in other respects. But Milton's poetry is not cast in any such narrow, commonplace mould: it is not so barren of resources. His worship of the Muse was not so simple or confined. A sound arises “like a steam of rich distilled perfumes”: we hear the pealing organ; but the incense on the altars is also there, and the statues of the gods are ranged around! The ear indeed predominates over the eye, because it is more immediately affected, and because the language of music blends more immediately with, and forms a
20 more natural accompaniment to, the variable and indefinite associations of ideas conveyed by words. But where the associations of the imagination are not the principal thing, the individual object is given by Milton with equal force and beauty. The strongest and best proof of this as a characteristic power of his mind is that the persons of Adam and Eve, of Satan, &c., are always accompanied in our imagination with the grandeur of the naked figure; they convey to us the idea of sculpture. As an instance, take the
30 following—

“ He soon

Saw within ken a glorious angel stand,
The same whom John saw also in the sun.

His back was turned, but not his brightness hid ;
 Of beaming sunny rays a golden tiar
 Circled his head, nor less his locks behind
 Illustrious on his shoulders fledge with wings
 Lay waving round : on some great charge employed
 He seemed, or fixed in cogitation deep.
 Glad was the spirit impure, as now in hope
 To find who might direct his wandering flight
 To Paradise, the happy seat of man,
 His journey's end, and our beginning woe. 10
 But first he casts to change his proper shape,
 Which else might work him danger or delay :
 And now a stripling cherub he appears,
 Not of the prime, yet such as in his face
 Youth smiled celestial, and to every limb
 Suitable grace diffused ; so well he feigned.
 Under a coronet his flowing hair
 In curls on either cheek played ; wings he wore
 Of many a coloured plume sprinkled with gold,
 His habit fit for speed succinct, and held 20
 Before his decent steps a silver wand."

The figures introduced here have all the elegance and precision of a Greek statue ; glossy and impurpled, tinged with golden light, and musical as the strings of Memnon's harp !

Again, nothing can be more magnificent than the portrait of Beelzebub—

" With Atlantean shoulders fit to bear
 The weight of mightiest monarchies : "

Or the comparison of Satan as he "lay floating many 30
a rood" to "that sea beast"—

" Leviathan, which God of all His works
 Created hugest that swim the ocean stream ! "

What a force of imagination is there in this last expression ! What an idea it conveys of the size of that

hugest of created beings, as if it shrunk up the ocean to a stream, and took up the sea in its nostrils as a very little thing! Force of style is one of Milton's greatest excellencies. Hence, perhaps, he stimulates us more in the reading, and less afterwards. The way to defend Milton against all impugnors is to take down the book and read it.

Milton's blank verse is the only blank verse in the language (except Shakespeare's) that deserves the name
 10 of verse. Dr Johnson, who had modelled his ideas of versification on the regular sing-song of Pope, condemns the 'Paradise Lost' as harsh and unequal. I shall not pretend to say that this is not sometimes the case; for where a degree of excellence beyond the mechanical rules of art is attempted, the poet must sometimes fail. But I imagine that there are more perfect examples in Milton of musical expression, or of an adaptation of the sound and movement
 20 of the verse to the meaning of the passage, than in all our other writers, whether of rhyme or blank verse, put together (with the exception already mentioned). Spenser is the most harmonious of our stanza writers, as Dryden is the most sounding and varied of our rhymists. But in neither is there anything like the same ear for music, the same power of approximating the varieties of poetical to those of musical rhythm, as there is in our great epic poet. The sound of his lines is moulded into the expression of the sentiment, almost of the very image.
 30 They rise or fall, pause or hurry rapidly on, with exquisite art, but without the least trick or affectation, as the occasion seems to require.

The following are some of the finest instances :—

“ His hand was known
 In Heaven by many a towered structure high . . .
 Nor was his name unheard or unadored
 In ancient Greece ; and in the Ausonian land
 Men called him Mulciber ; and how he fell
 From Heaven they fabled, thrown by angry Jove
 Sheer o’er the crystal battlements : from morn
 To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,
 A summer’s day, and with the setting sun
 Dropt from the zenith like a falling star
 On Lemnos, the Ægean isle : thus they relate,
 Erring.”

10

“ But chief the spacious hall . . .
 Thick swarmed, both on the ground and in the air,
 Brush’d with the hiss of rustling wings. As bees
 In spring time, when the sun with Taurus rides,
 Pour forth their populous youth about the hive
 In clusters ; they among fresh dews and flowers
 Fly to and fro, or on the smoothed plank,
 The suburb of their straw-built citadel,
 New rubbed with balm, expatiate, and confer
 Their state affairs : so thick the airy crowd
 Swarmed and were straitened ; till, the signal given,
 Behold a wonder ! They but now who seemed
 In bigness to surpass earth’s giant sons,
 Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room
 Throng numberless, like that Pygmean race
 Beyond the Indian mount ; or fairy elves,
 Whose midnight revels by a forest side
 Or fountain, some belated peasant sees,
 Or dreams he sees, while overhead the moon
 Sits arbitress, and nearer to the earth
 Wheels her pale course : they, on their mirth and dance
 Intent, with jocund music charm his ear ;
 At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds.”

20

30

I can give only another instance, though I have
 some difficulty in leaving off:—

“ Round he surveys (and well might, where he stood
 So high above the circling canopy
 Of flight’s extended shade) from eastern point

39

Of Libra to the fleecy star that bears
 Andromeda far off Atlantic seas
 Beyond the horizon ; then from pole to pole
 He views in breadth, and without longer pause
 Down right into the world's first region throws
 His flight precipitant, and winds with ease
 Through the pure marble air his oblique way
 Amongst innumerable stars, that shone
 Stars distant, but nigh-hand seemed other worlds ;
 10 Or other worlds they seemed or happy isles," &c.

The verse in this exquisitely modulated passage floats up and down as if it had itself wings. Milton has himself given us the theory of his versification—

“Such as the meeting soul may pierce
 In notes with many a winding bout
 Of linked sweetness long drawn out.”

Dr Johnson and Pope would have converted his vaulting Pegasus into a rocking-horse. Read any other blank verse but Milton's,—Thomson's, Young's,
 20 Cowper's, Wordsworth's,—and it will be found, from the want of the same insight into “the hidden soul of harmony,” to be mere lumbering prose.

To proceed to a consideration of the merits of ‘Paradise Lost’ in the most essential point of view, I mean as to the poetry of character and passion. I shall say nothing of the fable, or of other technical objections or excellencies ; but I shall try to explain at once the foundation of the interest belonging to the poem. I am ready to give up the dialogues in
 30 Heaven where, as Pope justly observes, “God the Father turns a school divine” ; nor do I consider the battle of the angels as the climax of sublimity, or the most successful effort of Milton's pen. In a word, the interest of the poem arises from the daring am-

bition and fierce passions of Satan, and from the account of the paradisaical happiness, and the loss of it by our first parents. Three-fourths of the work are taken up with these characters, and nearly all that relates to them is unmixed sublimity and beauty. The two first books alone are like two massy pillars of solid gold.

Satan is the most heroic subject that ever was chosen for a poem ; and the execution is as perfect as the design is lofty. He was the first of created 10 beings who, for endeavouring to be equal with the highest and to divide the empire of Heaven with the Almighty, was hurled down to Hell. His aim was no less than the throne of the universe ; his means, myriads of angelic armies bright, the third part of the heavens, whom he lured after him with his countenance, and who durst defy the Omnipotent in arms. His ambition was the greatest, and his punishment was the greatest ; but not so his despair, for his fortitude was as great as his sufferings. His strength 20 of mind was matchless as his strength of body ; the vastness of his designs did not surpass the firm, inflexible determination with which he submitted to his irreversible doom and final loss of all good. His power of action and of suffering was equal. He was the greatest power that was ever overthrown, with the strongest will left to resist or to endure. He was baffled, not confounded. He stood like a tower ; or

“ As when Heaven’s fire
Hath scathed the forest oaks or mountain pines.”

30

He is still surrounded with hosts of rebel angels, armed warriors, who own him as their sovereign leader, and

with whose fate he sympathises as he views them round, far as the eye can reach, though he keeps aloof from them in his own mind, and holds supreme counsel only with his own breast. An outcast from Heaven, Hell trembles beneath his feet, Sin and Death are at his heels, and mankind are his easy prey.

“ All is not lost—the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield ;
And what is else not to be overcome ”

10

are still his. The sense of his punishment seems lost in the magnitude of it ; the fierceness of tormenting flames is qualified and made innoxious by the greater fierceness of his pride ; the loss of infinite happiness to himself is compensated in thought by the power of inflicting infinite misery on others. Yet Satan is not the principle of malignity, or of the abstract love of evil, but of the abstract love of power, of pride, of self-will personified, to which last principle all other
20 good and evil, and even his own, are subordinate. From this principle he never once flinches. His love of power and contempt for suffering are never once relaxed from the highest pitch of intensity. His thoughts burn like a hell within him ; but the power of thought holds dominion in his mind over every other consideration. The consciousness of a determined purpose, of “ this intellectual being, those thoughts that wander through eternity,” though accompanied with endless pain, he prefers to nonentity,
30 to being “ swallowed up and lost in the wide womb of uncreated night.” He expresses the sum and substance of all ambition in one line : “ Fallen cherub, to be weak is miserable, doing or suffering ! ” After

such a conflict as his and such a defeat, to retreat in order, to rally, to make terms, to exist at all, is something; but he does more than this: he founds a new empire in Hell, and from it conquers this new world, whither he bends his undaunted flight, forcing his way through nether and surrounding fires. The poet has not in all this given us a mere shadowy outline; the strength is equal to the magnitude of the conception. The Achilles of Homer is not more distinct; the Titans were not more vast; Prometheus 10 chained to his rock was not a more terrific example of suffering and of crime. Wherever the figure of Satan is introduced, whether he walks or flies, rising "aloft incumbent on the dusky air," it is illustrated with the most striking and appropriate images; so that we see it always before us, gigantic, irregular, portentous, uneasy, and disturbed, but dazzling in its faded splendour, the clouded ruins of a god. The deformity of Satan is only in the depravity of his will; he has no 20 bodily deformity to excite our loathing or disgust. The horns and tail are not there, poor emblems of the unbending, unconquered spirit, of the writhing agonies within. Milton was too magnanimous and open an antagonist to support his argument by the by-tricks of a hump and cloven foot, to bring into the fair field of controversy the good old catholic prejudices of which Tasso and Dante have availed themselves, and which the mystic German critics would restore. He relied on the justice of his cause, and did not scruple to give the devil his due. Some 30 persons may think that he has carried his liberality too far, and injured the cause he professed to espouse by making him the chief person in his poem. Con-

sidering the nature of his subject, he would be equally in danger of running into this fault from his faith in religion and his love of rebellion ; and perhaps each of these motives had its full share in determining the choice of his subject.

Not only the figure of Satan, but his speeches in council, his soliloquies, his address to Eve, his share in the war in Heaven, or in the fall of man, show the same decided superiority of character. To give only
 10 one instance, almost the first speech he makes :—

“ ‘ Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,’
 Said then the lost archangel, ‘ this the seat
 That we must change for Heaven? this mournful gloom
 For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
 Who now is sovran can dispose and bid
 What shall be right : farthest from him is best
 Whom reason hath equalled, force hath made supreme
 Above his equals. Farewell happy fields,
 Where joy for ever dwells ! Hail horrors ! hail
 20 Infernal world ! and thou, profoundest Hell,
 Receive thy new possessor—one who brings
 A mind not to be changed by place or time.
 The mind is its own place, and in itself
 Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.
 What matter where, if I be still the same
 And what I should be, all but less than he
 Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
 We shall be free ; the Almighty hath not built
 Here for his envy, will not drive us hence :
 30 Here we may reign secure ; and, in my choice,
 To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell :
 Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.’ ”

The whole of the speeches and debates in Pandemonium are well worthy of the place and the occasion—with gods for speakers, and angels and archangels for hearers. There is a decided manly tone in the arguments and sentiments, an eloquent dogmatism,

as if each person spoke from thorough conviction. The author might here turn his philippics against Salmasius to good account. The rout in Heaven is like the fall of some mighty structure, nodding to its base "with hideous ruin and combustion dire." But perhaps of all the passages in 'Paradise Lost,' the description of the employments of the angels during the absence of Satan, some of whom "retreated in a silent valley, sing with notes angelical to many a harp their own heroic deeds and hapless 10 fall by doom of battle," is the most perfect example of mingled pathos and sublimity. What proves the truth of this noble picture in every part, and that the frequent complaint of want of interest in it is the fault of the reader, not of the poet, is that when any interest of a practical kind takes a shape that can be at all turned into this (and there is little doubt that Milton had some such in his eye in writing it), each party converts it to its own purposes, feels the absolute identity of these abstracted and high 20 speculations, and that, in fact, a noted political writer of the present day has exhausted nearly the whole account of Satan in the 'Paradise Lost' by applying it to a character whom he considered as after the devil (though I do not know whether he would make even that exception) the greatest enemy of the human race. This may serve to show that Milton's Satan is not a very insipid personage.

Of Adam and Eve it has been said that the ordinary reader can feel little interest in them, because 30 they have none of the passions, pursuits, or even relations of human life, except that of man and wife, the least interesting of all others, if not to the parties

concerned, at least to the bystanders. The preference has on this account been given to Homer, who, it is said, has left very vivid and infinitely diversified pictures of all the passions and affections, public and private, incident to human nature,—the relations of son, of brother, parent, friend, citizen, and many others. Longinus preferred the ‘Iliad’ to the ‘Odyssey’ on account of the greater number of battles it contains; but I can neither agree to his criticism nor assent to
10 the present objection. It is true there is little action in this part of Milton’s poem; but there is much repose and more enjoyment. There are none of the everyday occurrences, contentions, disputes, wars, fightings, feuds, jealousies, trades, professions, liveries, and common handicrafts of life; “no kind of traffic; letters are not known; no use of service, of riches, poverty, contract, succession, bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none; no occupation, no treason, felony,
20 sword, pike, knife, gun, nor need of any engine.” So much the better; thank Heaven, all these were yet to come. But still the die was cast, and in them our doom was sealed. In them

“The generations were prepared; the pangs,
The internal pangs, were ready, the dread strife
Of poor humanity’s afflicted will,
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.”

In their first false step we trace all our future woe, with loss of Eden. But there was a short and precious interval between, like the first blush of morn-
30 ing before the day is overcast with tempest, the dawn of the world, the birth of nature from “the unapparent deep,” with its first dews and freshness on its cheek, breathing odours. Theirs was the first delicious taste

of life, and on them depended all that was to come of it. In them hung trembling all our hopes and fears. They were as yet alone in the world, in the eye of nature, wondering at their new being, full of enjoyment and enraptured with one another, with the voice of their Maker walking in the garden, and ministering angels attendant on their steps, winged messengers from heaven like rosy clouds descending in their sight. Nature played around them her virgin fancies wild, and spread for them a repast "where no 10 crude surfeit reigned." Was there nothing in this scene which God and nature alone witnessed to interest a modern critic? What need was there of action where the heart was full of bliss and innocence without it? They had nothing to do but feel their own happiness and "know to know no more." "They toiled not, neither did they spin; yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." All things seem to acquire fresh sweetness, and to be clothed with fresh beauty in their sight. They tasted, 20 as it were, for themselves and us of all that there ever was pure in human bliss. "In them the burthen of the mystery, the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world, is lightened." They stood awhile perfect, but they afterwards fell, and were driven out of Paradise, tasting the first fruits of bitterness as they had done of bliss. But their pangs were such as a pure spirit might feel at the sight, their tears "such as angels weep." The pathos is of that mild contemplative kind which arises from regret 30 for the loss of unspeakable happiness, and resignation to inevitable fate. There is none of the fierceness of intemperate passion, none of the agony of mind

and turbulence of action, which is the result of the habitual struggle of the will with circumstances, irritated by repeated disappointment, and constantly setting its desires most eagerly on that which there is an impossibility of attaining. This would have destroyed the beauty of the whole picture. They had received their unlooked-for happiness as a free gift from their Creator's hands, and they submitted to its loss, not without sorrow, but without impious and
10 stubborn repining.

“In either hand the hastening angel caught
Our lingering parents, and to the eastern gate
Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast
To the subjected plain ; then disappeared.
They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
Waved over by that flaming brand ; the gate
With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms.
Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon ;
20 The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.”

VII.

DRYDEN AND POPE.

DRYDEN and Pope are the great masters of the artificial style of poetry in our language, as the poets of whom I have already treated, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, were of the natural ; and though this artificial style is generally and very justly acknowledged to be inferior to the other, yet those who stand at the head of that class ought perhaps to rank higher than those who occupy an inferior place in a superior class. They have a clear and independent claim upon our gratitude, as having produced a kind and degree of 10
excellence which existed equally nowhere else. What has been done well by some later writers of the highest style of poetry, is included in and obscured by a greater degree of power and genius in those before them : what has been done best by poets of an entirely distinct turn of mind stands by itself and tells for its whole amount. Young, for instance, Gray, or Aken-
 side, only follow in the train of Milton and Shake-
 speare : Pope and Dryden walk by their side, though of an unequal stature, and are entitled to a first place 20
 in the lists of fame. This seems to be not only the reason of the thing, but the common-sense of mankind,

who, without any regular process of reflection, judge of the merit of a work not more by its inherent and absolute worth than by its originality and capacity of gratifying a different faculty of the mind, or a different class of readers ; for it should be recollected that there may be readers (as well as poets) not of the highest class, though very good sort of people, and not altogether to be despised.

The question whether Pope was a poet has hardly
10 yet been settled, and is hardly worth settling ; for, if he was not a great poet, he must have been a great prose writer—that is, he was a great writer of some sort. He was a man of exquisite faculties and of the most refined taste ; and as he chose verse (the most obvious distinction of poetry) as the vehicle to express his ideas, he has generally passed for a poet, and a good one. If, indeed, by a great poet we mean one who gives the utmost grandeur to our conceptions of nature, or the utmost force to the passions of the
20 heart, Pope was not in this sense a great poet ; for the bent, the characteristic power, of his mind lay the clean contrary way—namely, in representing things as they appear to the indifferent observer, stripped of prejudice and passion, as in his ‘Critical Essays’ ; or in representing them in the most contemptible and insignificant point of view, as in his ‘Satires’ ; or in clothing the little with mock-dignity, as in his poems of Fancy ; or in adorning the trivial incidents and familiar relations of life with the utmost elegance of
30 expression, and all the flattering illusions of friendship or self-love, as in his ‘Epistles.’ He was not, then, distinguished as a poet of lofty enthusiasm, of strong imagination, with a passionate sense of the beauties

of nature, or a deep insight into the workings of the heart ; but he was a wit and a critic, a man of sense, of observation, and the world, with a keen relish for the elegancies of art or of nature when embellished by art, a quick tact for propriety of thought and manners as established by the forms and customs of society, a refined sympathy with the sentiments and habitudes of human life, as he felt them within the little circle of his family and friends. He was, in a word, the poet, not of nature, but of art ; and the distinction between 10 the two, as well as I can make it out, is this : The poet of nature is one who, from the elements of beauty, of power, and of passion in his own breast, sympathises with whatever is beautiful, and grand, and impassioned in nature, in its simple majesty, in its immediate appeal to the senses, to the thoughts and hearts of all men ; so that the poet of nature, by the truth, and depth, and harmony of his mind, may be said to hold communion with the very soul of nature, to be identified 20 with, and to foreknow, and to record the feelings of all men at all times and places, as they are liable to the same impressions, and to exert the same power over the minds of his readers that nature does. He sees things in their eternal beauty, for he sees them as they are ; he feels them in their universal interest, for he feels them as they affect the first principles of his and our common nature. Such was Homer, such was Shakespeare, whose works will last as long as nature, because they are a copy of the indestructible forms and everlasting impulses of nature, welling out from the 30 bosom as from a perennial spring, or stamped upon the senses by the hand of their Maker. The power of the imagination in them is the representative power of

all nature. It has its centre in the human soul, and makes the circuit of the universe.

Pope was not assuredly a poet of this class, or in the first rank of it. He saw nature only dressed by art ; he judged of beauty by fashion ; he sought for truth in the opinions of the world ; he judged of the feelings of others by his own. The capacious soul of Shakespeare had an intuitive and mighty sympathy with whatever could enter into the heart of man in all
10 possible circumstances : Pope had an exact knowledge of all that he himself loved or hated, wished or wanted. Milton has winged his daring flight from heaven to earth through Chaos and old Night. Pope's Muse never wandered with safety but from his library to his grotto, or from his grotto into his library back again. His mind dwelt with greater pleasure on his own garden than on the garden of Eden : he could describe the faultless whole-length mirror that reflected his own person better than the smooth surface of the lake that
20 reflects the face of heaven, a piece of cut glass or a pair of paste buckles with more brilliance and effect than a thousand dew-drops glittering in the sun. He would be more delighted with a patent lamp than with "the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow" that fills the skies with its soft silent lustre, that trembles through the cottage window, and cheers the watchful mariner on the lonely wave. In short, he was the poet of personality and of polished life. That which was nearest to him was the greatest : the fashion of the day bore sway in his mind
30 over the immutable laws of nature. He preferred the artificial to the natural in external objects, because he had a stronger fellow-feeling with the self-love of the maker or proprietor of a gewgaw than admiration of

that which was interesting to all mankind. He preferred the artificial to the natural in passion, because the involuntary and uncalculating impulses of the one hurried him away with a force and vehemence with which he could not grapple ; while he could trifle with the conventional and superficial modifications of mere sentiment at will, laugh at or admire, put them on or off like a masquerade dress, make much or little of them, indulge them for a longer or a shorter time, as he pleased, and because, while they amused his fancy 10 and exercised his ingenuity, they never once disturbed his vanity, his levity, or indifference. His mind was the antithesis of strength and grandeur : its power was the power of indifference. He had none of the enthusiasm of poetry : he was in poetry what the sceptic is in religion.

It cannot be denied that his chief excellence lay more in diminishing than in aggrandising objects ; in checking, not in encouraging, our enthusiasm ; in sneering at the extravagances of fancy or passion, 20 instead of giving a loose to them ; in describing a row of pins and needles rather than the embattled spears of Greeks and Trojans ; in penning a lampoon or a compliment, and in praising Martha Blount.

Shakespeare says—

“ In Fortune’s ray and brightness

The herd hath more annoyance by the breese
Than by the tiger ; but when the splitting wind
Makes flexible the knees of knotted oaks,
And flies fled under shade, why, then
The thing of courage,
As roused with rage, with rage doth sympathise,
And with an accent tuned in self-same key
Retorts to chiding Fortune.”

There is none of this rough work in Pope. His Muse was on a peace-establishment, and grew somewhat effeminate by long ease and indulgence. He lived in the smiles of fortune, and basked in the favour of the great. In his smooth and polished verse we meet with no prodigies of nature, but with miracles of wit; the thunders of his pen are whispered flatteries, its forked lightnings pointed sarcasms; for "the gnarled oak" he gives us "the soft
10 myrtle"; for rocks, and seas, and mountains, artificial grass-plats, gravel-walks, and tinkling rills; for earthquakes and tempests, the breaking of a flower-pot or the fall of a china-jar; for the tug and war of the elements or the deadly strife of the passions we have

"Calm contemplation and poetic ease."

Yet within this retired and narrow circle how much, and that how exquisite, was contained! What discrimination, what wit, what delicacy, what fancy, what lurking spleen, what elegance of thought, what pam-
20 pered refinement of sentiment! It is like looking at the world through a microscope, where everything assumes a new character and a new consequence, where things are seen in their minutest circumstances and slightest shades of difference; where the little becomes gigantic, the deformed beautiful, and the beautiful deformed. The wrong end of the magnifier is, to be sure, held to everything; but still the exhibition is highly curious, and we know not whether to be most
30 pleased or surprised. Such, at least, is the best account I am able to give of this extraordinary man without doing injustice to him or others. It is time to refer to particular instances in his works. The 'Rape

of the Lock' is the best or most ingenious of these. It is the most exquisite specimen of filigree work ever invented. It is admirable in proportion as it is made of nothing—

“ More subtle web Arachne cannot spin,
Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
Of scorched dew, do not in the air more lightly flee.”

It is made of gauze and silver spangles. The most glittering appearance is given to everything, to paste, pomatum, billet-doux, and patches. *Airs*, languid 10
airs, breathe around: the atmosphere is perfumed with affectation. A toilette is described with the solemnity of an altar raised to the goddess of vanity, and the history of a silver bodkin is given with all the pomp of heraldry. No pains are spared, no profusion of ornament, no splendour of poetic diction, to set off the meanest things. The balance between the concealed irony and the assumed gravity is as nicely trimmed as the balance of power in Europe. The little is made great, and the great little. You hardly 20
know whether to laugh or weep. It is the triumph of insignificance, the apotheosis of foppery and folly. It is the perfection of the mock-heroic! I will give only the two following passages in illustration of these remarks. Can anything be more elegant and graceful than the description of Belinda in the beginning of the second canto?

“ Not with more glories, in the ethereal plain,
The sun first rises o'er the purpled main,
Than, issuing forth, the rival of his beams
Launched on the bosom of the silver Thames.
Fair nymphs and well-drest youths around her shone,
But every eye was fixed on her alone.

On her white breast a sparkling cross she wore,
 Which Jews might kiss and infidels adore.
 Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
 Quick as her eyes, and as unfixed as those ;
 Favours to none, to all she smiles extends ;
 Oft she rejects, but never once offends.
 Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike ;
 And, like the sun, they shine on all alike.
 Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride,
 10 Might hide her faults, if belles had faults to hide :
 If to her share some female errors fall,
 Look on her face, and you'll forget 'em all.
 This nymph, to the destruction of mankind,
 Nourished two locks, which graceful hung behind
 In equal curls, and well conspired to deck
 With shining ringlets the smooth ivory neck."

The following is the introduction to the account of
 Belinda's assault upon the baron bold, who had dis-
 severed one of these locks "from her fair head for
 20 ever and for ever"—

"Now meet thy fate, incensed Belinda cried,
 And drew a deadly bodkin from her side.
 (The same, his ancient personage to deck,
 Her great great grandsire wore about his neck,
 In three seal-rings ; which after, melted down,
 Formed a vast buckle for his widow's gown :
 Her infant grandame's whistle next it grew,
 The bells she jingled, and the whistle blew ;
 Then in a bodkin graced her mother's hairs
 30 Which long she wore, and now Belinda wears.)"

I do not know how far Pope was indebted for the
 original idea, or the delightful execution of this poem,
 to the 'Lutrin' of Boileau.

The 'Rape of the Lock' is a double-refined essence
 of wit and fancy, as the 'Essay on Criticism' is of wit
 and sense. The quantity of thought and observation
 in this work, for so young a man as Pope was when

he wrote it, is wonderful, unless we adopt the supposition that most men of genius spend the rest of their lives in teaching others what they themselves have learned under twenty. The conciseness and felicity of the expression are equally remarkable. Thus, on reasoning on the variety of men's opinion, he says—

“’Tis with our judgments as our watches ; none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.”

Nothing can be more original and happy than the 10
general remarks and illustrations in the ‘Essay’: the critical rules laid down are too much those of a school, and of a confined one. There is one passage in the ‘Essay on Criticism’ in which the author speaks with that eloquent enthusiasm of the fame of ancient writers which those will always feel who have themselves any hope or chance of immortality.

“Still green with bays each ancient altar stands,
Above the reach of sacrilegious hands ;
Secure from flames, from envy’s fiercer rage, 20
Destructive war, and all-involving age . . .
Hail, bards triumphant, born in happier days.
Immortal heirs of universal praise !
Whose honours with increase of ages grow,
As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow.”

These lines come with double force and beauty on the reader as they were dictated by the writer’s despair of ever attaining that lasting glory which he celebrates with such disinterested enthusiasm in others, from the lateness of the age in which he lived, and from his 30
writing in a tongue not understood by other nations, and that grows obsolete and unintelligible to ourselves at the end of every second century. But he needed

not have thus antedated his own poetical doom—the loss and entire oblivion of that which can never die. If he had known, he might have boasted that his “little bark,” wafted down the stream of time,

“With *theirs* should sail,
Pursue the triumph and partake the gale,”

—if those who know how to set a due value on the blessing were not the last to decide confidently on their own pretensions to it.

- 10 There is a cant in the present day about genius as everything in poetry: there was a cant in the time of Pope about sense as performing all sorts of wonders. It was a kind of watchword, the shibboleth of a critical party of the day. As a proof of the exclusive attention which it occupied in their minds, it is remarkable that in the ‘Essay on Criticism’ (not a very long poem) there are no less than half a score successive couplets rhyming to the word *sense*. This appears almost incredible without giving the instances, and no less so
- 20 when they are given—

- “But of the two, less dangerous is the offence
To tire our patience than mislead our sense.”—*lines* 3, 4.
- “In search of wit these lose their common-sense,
And then turn critics in their own defence.”—*ll.* 28, 29.
- “Pride, where wit fails, steps in to our defence,
And fills up all the mighty void of sense.”—*ll.* 209, 210.
- “Some by old words to fame have made pretence,
Ancients in phrase, mere moderns in their sense.”—*ll.* 324, 325.
- “’Tis not enough no harshness gives offence ;
- 30 The sound must seem an echo to the sense.”—*ll.* 364, 365.
- “At every trifle scorn to take offence ;
That always shows great pride or little sense.”—*ll.* 386, 387.
- “Be silent always when you doubt your sense,
And speak, though sure, with seeming diffidence.”—*ll.* 566, 567.

- “Be niggards of advice on no pretence,
For the worst avarice is that of sense.”—*ll.* 578, 579.
“Strain out the last dull droppings of their sense,
And rhyme with all the rage of impotence.”—*ll.* 608, 609.
“Horace still charms with graceful negligence,
And without method talks us into sense.”—*ll.* 653, 654.

I have mentioned this the more for the sake of those critics who are bigoted idolisers of our author chiefly on the score of his correctness. These persons seem to be of opinion that “there is but one perfect writer, 10 even Pope.” This is, however, a mistake: his excellence is by no means faultlessness. If he had no great faults, he is full of little errors. His grammatical construction is often lame and imperfect. In the ‘Abelard and Eloise,’ he says—

“There died the best of passions, Love and Fame.”

This is not a legitimate ellipsis. Fame is not a passion, though love is; but his ear was evidently confused by the meeting of the sounds “love and fame,” as if they of themselves immediately implied “love, and love of 20 fame.” Pope’s rhymes are constantly defective, being rhymes to the eye instead of the ear, and this to a greater degree not only than in later but than in preceding writers. The praise of his versification must be confined to its uniform smoothness and harmony. In the translation of the ‘Iliad,’ which has been considered as his masterpiece in style and execution, he continually changes the tenses in the same sentence for the purpose of the rhyme, which shows either a want of technical resources or great inattention to punctilious 30 exactness. But to have done with this.

The ‘Epistle of Eloise to Abelard’ is the only exception I can think of to the general spirit of the foregoing

- remarks ; and I should be disingenuous not to acknowledge that it is an exception. The foundation is in the letters themselves of Abelard and Eloise, which are quite as impressive, but still in a different way. It is fine as a poem : it is finer as a piece of high-wrought eloquence. No woman could be supposed to write a better love-letter in verse. Besides the richness of the historical materials, the high gusto of the original sentiments which Pope had to work upon, there were per-
 10 haps circumstances in his own situation which made him enter into the subject with even more than a poet's feeling. The tears shed are drops gushing from the heart : the words are burning sighs breathed from the soul of love. Perhaps the poem to which it bears the greatest similarity in our language is Dryden's 'Tancred and Sigismunda,' taken from Boccaccio. Pope's 'Eloise' will bear this comparison ; and after such a test, with Boccaccio for the original author and Dryden for the translator, it need shrink from no other.
 20 There is something exceedingly tender and beautiful in the sound of the concluding lines—

“If ever chance two wandering lovers brings
 To Paraclete's white walls and silver springs,” &c.

- The 'Essay on Man' is not Pope's best work. It is a theory which Bolingbroke is supposed to have given him, and which he expanded into verse. But “he spins the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument.” All that he says, “the very words, and to the self-same tune,” would prove just as
 30 well that whatever is, is *wrong*, as that whatever is, is *right*. The 'Dunciad' has splendid passages, but in general it is dull, heavy, and mechanical. The sar-

casm already quoted on Settle, the Lord Mayor's poet (for at that time there was a city as well as a court poet)—

“Now night descending, the proud scene was o'er,
But lived in Settle's numbers one day more”—

is the finest inversion of immortality conceivable. It is even better than his serious apostrophe to the great heirs of glory, the triumphant bards of antiquity!

The finest burst of severe moral invective in all Pope is the prophetic conclusion of the ‘Epilogue to the Satires’—

“Virtue may choose the high or low degree,
’Tis just alike to virtue, and to me ;
Dwell in a monk, or light upon a king,
She’s still the same beloved, contented thing.
Vice is undone, if she forgets her birth,
And stoops from angels to the dregs of earth :
But ’tis the Fall degrades her to a whore ;
Let greatness own her, and she’s mean no more.
Her birth, her beauty, crowds and courts confess, 20
Chaste matrons praise her, and grave bishops bless ;
In golden chains the willing world she draws,
And hers the gospel is, and hers the laws ;
Mounts the tribunal, lifts her scarlet head,
And sees pale Virtue carted in her stead.
Lo ! at the wheels of her triumphal car,
Old England’s Genius, rough with many a scar,
Dragged in the dust ! his arms hang idly round,
His flag inverted trails along the ground !
Our youth, all liveried o’er with foreign gold, 30
Before her dance ; behind her crawl the old !
See thronging millions to the Pagod run,
And offer country, parent, wife, or son !
Hear her black trumpet through the land proclaim
That *not to be corrupted is the shame.*
In soldier, churchman, patriot, man in power,
’Tis avarice all, ambition is no more !

See all our nobles begging to be slaves !
 See all our fools aspiring to be knaves !
 The wit of cheats, the courage of a whore,
 Are what ten thousand envy and adore :
 All, all look up with reverential awe
 At crimes that 'scape or triumph o'er the law ;
 While truth, worth, wisdom, daily they decry—
 'Nothing is sacred now but villany.'
 Yet may this verse (if such a verse remain)
 Show there was one who held it in disdain."

10

His 'Satires' are not, in general, so good as his
 'Epistles.' His enmity is effeminate and petulant from
 a sense of weakness, as his friendship was tender from
 a sense of gratitude. I do not like, for instance, his
 character of Chartres, or his characters of women. His
 delicacy often borders upon sickliness ; his fastidious-
 ness makes others fastidious. But his compliments are
 divine : they are equal in value to a house or an estate.
 Take the following. In addressing Lord Mansfield,
 20 he speaks of the grave as a scene—

"Where Murray, long enough his country's pride,
 Shall be no more than Tully, or than Hyde."

To Bolingbroke he says—

"Why rail they then, if but a wreath of mine,
 Oh all-accomplished St John, deck thy shrine?"

Again, he has bequeathed this praise to Lord Corn-
 bury—

"Despise low joys, low gains ;
 Disdain whatever Cornbury disdains ;
 Be virtuous, and be happy for your pains."

30

One would think (though there is no knowing) that a
 descendant of this nobleman, if there be such a person
 living, could hardly be guilty of a mean or paltry
 action.

The finest piece of personal satire in Pope (perhaps in the world) is his character of Addison ; and this, it may be observed, is of a mixed kind, made up of his respect for the man and a cutting sense of his failings. The other finest one is that of Buckingham, and the best part of that is the pleasurable—

“ Alas ! how changed from him,
That life of pleasure, and that soul of whim !
Gallant and gay in Cliveden’s proud alcove,
The bower of wanton Shrewsbury and love ! ”

10

Among his happiest and most inimitable effusions are the Epistles to Arbuthnot and to Jervas the painter : amiable patterns of the delightful unconcerned life, blending ease with dignity, which poets and painters then led. Thus he says to Arbuthnot—

“ Why did I write ? What sin to me unknown
Dipped me in ink, my parents , or my own ?
As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,
I lisped in numbers, for the numbers came.
I left no calling for this idle trade,
No duty broke, no father disobeyed :
The muse but served to ease some friend, not wife,
To help me through this long disease, my life !
To second, Arbuthnot ! thy art and care,
And teach the being you preserved to bear.

20

But why then publish ? Granville the polite,
And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write ;
Well-natured Garth inflamed with early praise,
And Congreve loved, and Swift endured, my lays ;
The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield, read ;
E’en mitred Rochester would nod the head ;
And St John’s self (great Dryden’s friend before)
With open arms received one poet more.
Happy my studies when by these approved !
Happier their author when by these beloved !
From these the world will judge of men and books,
Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cookes.”

30

I cannot help giving also the conclusion of the
'Epistle to Jervas'—

10 " Oh, lasting as those colours, may they shine,
Free as thy stroke, yet faultless as thy line ;
New graces yearly, like thy works, display,
Soft without weakness, without glaring gay ;
Led by some rule, that guides, but not constrains,
And finished more through happiness than pains.
The kindred arts shall in their praise conspire,
One dip the pencil, and one string the lyre.
Yet should the Graces all thy figures place,
And breathe an air divine on every face ;
Yet should the Muses bid my numbers roll
Strong as their charms, and gentle as their soul ;
With Zeuxis' Helen thy Bridgewater vie,
And these be sung till Granville's Myra die :
Alas ! how little from the grave we claim !
Thou but preserv'st a face, and I a name."

And shall we cut ourselves off from beauties like
20 these with a theory? Shall we shut up our books and
seal up our senses to please the dull spite and in-
ordinate vanity of those "who have eyes, but they see
not ; ears, but they hear not ; and understandings, but
they understand not," and go about asking our blind
guides whether Pope was a poet or not? It will never
do. Such persons, when you point out to them a fine
passage in Pope, turn it off to something of the same
sort in some other writer. Thus they say that the line
"I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came" is pretty,
30 but taken from that of Ovid—*Et quum conabar scribere,*
versus erat. They are safe in this mode of criticism :
there is no danger of anyone's tracing their writings to
the classics.

Pope's letters and prose writings neither take away
from nor add to his poetical reputation. There is

occasionally a littleness of manner and an unnecessary degree of caution. He appears anxious to say a good thing in every word as well as every sentence. They, however, give a very favourable idea of his moral character in all respects; and his letters to Atterbury, in his disgrace and exile, do equal honour to both. If I had to choose, there are one or two persons—and but one or two—that I should like to have been better than Pope!

Dryden was a better prose writer, and a bolder and more varied versifier, than Pope. He was a more vigorous thinker, a more correct and logical declaimer, and had more of what may be called strength of mind than Pope; but he had not the same refinement and delicacy of feeling. Dryden's eloquence and spirit were possessed in a higher degree by others, and in nearly the same degree by Pope himself; but that by which Pope was distinguished was an essence which he alone possessed, and of incomparable value on that sole account. Dryden's 'Epistles' are excellent, but inferior to Pope's, though they appear (particularly the admirable one to Congreve) to have been the model on which the latter formed his. His 'Satires' are better than Pope's. His 'Absalom and Achitophel' is superior, both in force of invective and discrimination of character, to anything of Pope's in the same way. The character of Achitophel is very fine, and breathes, if not a sincere love for virtue, a strong spirit of indignation against vice.

'MacFlecknoe' is the origin of the idea of the 'Dunciad'; but it is less elaborately constructed, less feeble, and less heavy. The difference between Pope's satirical portraits and Dryden's appears to be this, in a

good measure, that Dryden seems to grapple with his antagonists, and to describe real persons: Pope seems to refine upon them in his own mind, and to make them out just what he pleases, till they are not real characters, but the mere drivelling effusions of his spleen and malice. Pope describes the thing, and then goes on describing his own description till he loses himself in verbal repetitions. Dryden recurs to the object often, takes fresh sittings of nature, and gives us new
 10 strokes of character as well as of his pencil. The 'Hind and Panther' is an allegory as well as a satire, and so far it tells less home: the battery is not so point-blank. But otherwise it has more genius, vehemence, and strength of description than any other of Dryden's works, not excepting the 'Absalom and Achitophel.' It also contains the finest examples of varied and sounding versification. I will quote the following as an instance of what I mean. He is complaining of the treatment which the Papists, under James II., received
 20 from the Church of England—

“ Besides these jolly birds, whose corpse impure
 Repaid their commons with their salt manure,
 Another farm he had behind his house,
 Not overstocked, but barely for his use ;
 Wherein his poor domestic poultry fed,
 And from his pious hand received their bread.
 Our pampered pigeons with malignant eyes
 Beheld these inmates and their nurseries ;
 Though hard their fare, at evening and at morn
 30 A cruise of water and an ear of corn,
 Yet still they grudged that modicum, and thought
 A sheaf in every single grain was brought.
 Fain would they filch that little food away,
 While unrestrained those happy gluttons prey.

And much they grieved to see so nigh their hall
 The bird that warned St Peter of his fall ;
 That he should raise his mitred crest on high,
 And clap his wings, and call his family
 To sacred rites ; and vex the ethereal powers
 With midnight matins at uncivil hours ;
 Nay more, his quiet neighbours should molest
 Just in the sweetness of their morning rest.
 Beast of a bird ! supinely when he might
 Lie snug and sleep, to rise before the light ! 10
 What if his dull forefathers used that cry,
 Could he not let a bad example die ?
 The world was fallen into an easier way :
 This age knew better than to fast and pray.
 Good sense in sacred worship would appear,
 So to begin as they might end the year.
 Such feats in former times had wrought the falls
 Of crowing chanticleers in cloistered walls.
 Expelled for this and for their lands, they fled ;
 And sister Partlet with her hooded head 20
 Was hooted hence, because she would not pray a-bed."

There is a magnanimity of abuse in some of these epithets, a fearless choice of topics of invective, which may be considered as the heroical in satire.

The 'Annus Mirabilis' is a tedious performance : it is a tissue of far-fetched, heavy, lumbering conceits, and in the worst style of what has been denominated metaphysical poetry. His 'Odes,' in general, are of the same stamp : they are the hard-strained offspring of a meagre, meretricious fancy. The famous 30
 'Ode on St Cecilia' deserves its reputation ; for, as a piece of poetical mechanism to be set to music, or recited in alternate strophe and antistrophe, with classical allusions and flowing verse, nothing can be better. It is equally fit to be said or sung : it is not equally good to read. It is lyrical without being

epic or dramatic. For instance, the description of Bacchus—

“The jolly god in triumph comes ;
Sound the trumpets, beat the drums ;
Flushed with a purple grace,
He shows his honest face,”—

does not answer, as it ought, to our idea of the god returning from the conquest of India with satyrs and wild beasts that he had tamed following in his train :
10 crowned with vine leaves, and riding in a chariot drawn by leopards, such as we have seen him painted by Titian or Rubens ! Lyrical poetry, of all others, bears the nearest resemblance to painting : it deals in hieroglyphics and passing figures, which depend for effect, not on the working out, but on the selection. It is the dance and pantomime of poetry. In variety and rapidity of movement, the ‘Alexander’s Feast’ has all that can be required in this respect : it wants only loftiness and truth of character.

20 Dryden’s plays are better than Pope could have written ; for though he does not go out of himself by the force of imagination, he goes out of himself by the force of commonplaces and rhetorical dialogue. On the other hand, they are not so good as Shakespeare’s, but he has left the best character of Shakespeare that has ever been written.¹

¹ “To begin then with Shakespeare : he was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily : when he describes anything you more than see it—you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning give him the greater commendation : he was naturally learned ; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature ; he looked inwards and found

His alterations from Chaucer and Boccaccio show a greater knowledge of the taste of his readers and power of pleasing them than acquaintance with the genius of his authors. He ekes out the lameness of the verse in the former, and breaks the force of the passion in both. The 'Tancred and Sigismunda' is the only general exception, in which, I think, he has fully retained, if not improved upon, the impassioned declamation of the original. The 'Honorio' has none of the bewildered, dreary, preternatural 10 effect of Boccaccio's story. Nor has the 'Flower and the Leaf' anything of the enchanting simplicity and concentrated feeling of Chaucer's romantic fiction. Dryden, however, sometimes seemed to indulge himself as well as his readers, as in keeping entire that noble line in Palamon's address to Venus—

“Thou gladder of the mount of Cithæron !”

His 'Tales' have been, upon the whole, the most popular of his works ; and I should think that a translation of some of the other serious tales in Boc- 20 caccio and Chaucer, as that of Isabella, The Falcon, of Constance, the Prioress's Tale, and others, if executed with taste and spirit, could not fail to succeed in the present day.

It should appear, in tracing the history of our literature there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike ; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat, insipid ; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great when some great occasion is presented to him. No man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets

Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi.”

ture, that poetry had, at the period of which we are speaking, in general declined by successive gradations from the poetry of imagination in the time of Elizabeth to the poetry of fancy (to adopt a modern distinction) in the time of Charles I.; and again from the poetry of fancy to that of wit, as in the reign of Charles II. and Queen Anne. It degenerated into the poetry of mere commonplaces, both in style and thought, in the succeeding reigns; as in the latter
10 part of the last century it was transformed, by means of the French Revolution, into the poetry of paradox.

VIII.

THOMSON AND COWPER.

THOMSON, the kind-hearted Thomson, was the most indolent of mortals and of poets. But he was also one of the best both of mortals and of poets. Dr Johnson makes it his praise that he wrote "no line which dying he would wish to blot." Perhaps a better proof of his honest simplicity and inoffensive goodness of disposition would be that he wrote no line which any other person living would wish that he should blot. Indeed, he himself wished, on his death-bed, formally to expunge his dedication of one of the Seasons to that finished courtier and candid biographer of his own life, Bubb Doddington. As critics, however, not as moralists, we might say, on the other hand: "Would he had blotted a thousand!" The same suavity of temper and sanguine warmth of feeling which threw such a natural grace and genial spirit of enthusiasm over his poetry was also the cause of his inherent vices and defects. He is affected through carelessness, pompous from unsuspecting simplicity of character. He is frequently pedantic and ostentatious in his style, because he had no consciousness of these vices in

himself. He mounts upon stilts, not out of vanity, but indolence. He seldom writes a good line but he makes up for it by a bad one. He takes advantage of all the most trite and mechanical commonplaces of imagery and diction as a kindly relief to his Muse, and as if he thought them quite as good, and likely to be quite as acceptable to the reader, as his own poetry. He did not think the difference worth putting himself to the trouble of accomplishing. He had too little
10 art to conceal his art, or did not even seem to know that there was any occasion for it. His art is as naked and undisguised as his nature : the one is as pure and genuine as the other is gross, gaudy, and meretricious. All that is admirable in the 'Seasons' is the emanation of a fine natural genius and sincere love of his subject, unforced, unstudied, that comes uncalled for, and departs unbidden. But he takes no pains, uses no self-correction ; or if he seems to labour, it is worse than labour lost. His genius "cannot be constrained by
20 mastery." The feeling of nature, of the changes of the seasons, was in his mind, and he could not help conveying this feeling to the reader by the mere force of spontaneous expression ; but if the expression did not come of itself, he left the whole business to chance, or, willing to evade instead of encountering the difficulties of his subject, fills up the intervals of true inspiration with the most vapid and worthless materials, pieces out a beautiful half line with a bombastic allusion, or overloads an exquisitely natural sentiment
30 or image with a cloud of painted, pompous, cumbrous phrases, like the shower of roses in which he represents the Spring, his own lovely, fresh, and innocent Spring, as descending to the earth—

“Come, gentle Spring ! ethereal Mildness ! come,
 And from the bosom of yon drooping cloud,
 While music wakes around, veiled in a shower
 Of shadowing roses, on our plains descend.”

Who, from such a flimsy, roundabout, unmeaning commencement as this, would expect the delightful, unexaggerated, home-felt descriptions of natural scenery which are scattered in such unconscious profusion through this and the following cantos ! For instance, the very next passage is crowded with a set of striking 10 images—

“And see where surly Winter passes off
 Far to the north, and calls his ruffian blasts :
 His blasts obey, and quit the howling hill,
 The shattered forest, and the ravaged vale ;
 While softer gales succeed, at whose kind touch
 Dissolving snows in livid torrents lost,
 The mountains lift their green heads to the sky.
 As yet the trembling year is unconfirmed,
 And Winter oft at eve resumes the breeze,
 Chills the pale morn, and bids his driving sleets
 Deform the day delightless ; so that scarce
 The bittern knows his time, with bill ingulph
 To shake the sounding marsh, or from the shore
 The plovers when to scatter o’er the heath,
 And sing their wild notes to the listening waste.”

20

Thomson is the best of our descriptive poets, for he gives most of the poetry of natural description. Others have been quite equal to him, or have surpassed him, as Cowper for instance, in the picturesque part of 30 his art, in marking the peculiar features and curious details of objects : no one has yet come up to him in giving the sum total of their effects, their varying influences on the mind. He does not go into the *minutiæ* of a landscape, but describes the vivid im-

pression which the whole makes upon his own imagination, and thus transfers the same unbroken, unimpaired impression to the imagination of his readers. The colours with which he paints seem yet breathing, like those of the living statue in the 'Winter's Tale.' Nature in his descriptions is seen growing around us, fresh and lusty as in itself. We feel the effect of the atmosphere, its humidity or clearness, its heat or cold, the glow of summer, the gloom of winter, the tender
10 promise of the spring, the full overshadowing foliage, the declining pomp and deepening tints of autumn. He transports us to the scorching heat of vertical suns, or plunges us into the chilling horrors and desolation of the frozen zone. We hear the snow drifting against the broken casement without, and see the fire blazing on the hearth within. The first scattered drops of a vernal shower patter on the leaves above our heads, or the coming storm resounds through the leafless groves. In a word, he describes not to the eye alone, but to
20 the other senses, and to the whole man. He puts his heart into his subject, writes as he feels, and humanises whatever he touches. He makes all his descriptions teem with life and vivifying soul. His faults were those of his style—of the author and the man ; but the original genius of the poet, the pith and marrow of his imagination, the fine natural mould in which his feelings were bedded, were too much for him to counteract by neglect, or affectation, or false ornaments. It is for this reason that he is perhaps the most popular of all
30 our poets, treating of a subject that all can understand, and in a way that is interesting to all alike—to the ignorant or the refined—because he gives back the impression which the things themselves make upon us

in nature. "That," said a man of genius, seeing a little shabby soiled copy of Thomson's 'Seasons' lying on the window-seat of an obscure country alehouse—"That is true fame!"

It has been supposed by some that the 'Castle of Indolence' is Thomson's best poem; but that is not the case. He has in it, indeed, poured out the whole soul of indolence, diffuse, relaxed, supine, dissolved into a voluptuous dream, and surrounded himself with a set of objects and companions in entire unison with 10 the listlessness of his own temper. Nothing can well go beyond the descriptions of these inmates of the place, and their luxurious pampered way of life; of him who came among them like "a burnished fly in month of June," but soon left them on his heedless way; and him,

"For whom the merry bells had rung, I ween,
If in this nook of quiet bells had ever been."

The indoor quiet and cushioned ease, where all was "one full-swelling bed"; the out-of-door stillness, 20 broken only by "the stock-dove's plaint amid the forest deep,

"That drowsy rustled to the sighing gale,"

are in the most perfect and delightful keeping. But still there are no passages in this exquisite little production of sportive ease and fancy equal to the best of those in the 'Seasons.' Warton, in his 'Essay on Pope,' was the first to point out and do justice to some of these; for instance, to the description of the effects of the contagion among our ships at Carthage; of 30 "the frequent corse, heard nightly plunged amid the sullen waves"; and to the description of the pilgrims

lost in the deserts of Arabia. This last passage, profound and striking as it is, is not free from those faults of style which I have already noticed—

“Breathed hot
 From all the boundless furnace of the sky,
 And the wide glittering waste of burning sand,
 A suffocating wind the pilgrim smites
 With instant death. Patient of thirst and toil,
 Son of the desert, even the camel feels
 Shot through his withered heart the fiery blast.
 Or from the black-red ether, bursting broad,
 Sallics the sudden whirlwind. Straight the sands,
 Commoved around, in gathering eddies play;
 Nearer and nearer still they darkening come,
 Till, with the general all-involving storm
 Swept up, the whole continuous wilds arise;
 And by their noon-day fount dejected thrown,
 Or sunk at night in sad disastrous sleep,
 Beneath descending hills the caravan
 Is buried deep. In Cairo’s crowded streets,
 The impatient merchant, wondering, waits in vain;
 And Mecca saddens at the long delay.”

There are other passages of equal beauty with these; such as that of the hunted stag, followed by “the inhuman rout” that—

“From the shady depth
 Expel him, circling through his every shift.
 He sweeps the forest oft, and sobbing sees
 The glades mild opening to the golden day,
 Where in kind contest with his butting friends
 He wont to struggle, or his loves enjoy.”

The whole of the description of the frozen zone in the ‘Winter’ is perhaps even finer and more thoroughly felt, as being done from early associations, than that of the torrid zone in his ‘Summer.’ Anything more beautiful than the following account of the Siberian exiles is, I think, hardly to be found in the whole range of poetry—

“ There through the prison of unbounded wilds,
 Barred by the hand of nature from escape,
 Wide roams the Russian exile. Nought around
 Strikes his sad eye but deserts lost in snow,
 And heavy-loaded groves, and solid floods
 That stretch athwart the solitary vast
 Their icy horrors to the frozen main,
 And cheerless towns far distant, never blessed,
 Save when its annual course the caravan
 Bends to the golden coast of rich Cathay,
 With news of human kind.”

10

The feeling of loneliness, of distance, of lingering, slow-revolving years of pining expectation, of desolation within and without the heart, was never more finely expressed than it is here.

The account which follows of the employments of the Polar night, of the journeys of the natives by moonlight, drawn by reindeer, and of the return of spring in Lapland,

“ Where pure Niemi's fairy mountains rise,
 And, fringed with roses, Tenglio rolls his stream.”

20

is equally picturesque and striking in a different way. The traveller lost in the snow is a well-known and admirable dramatic episode. I prefer, however, giving one example of our author's skill in painting common domestic scenery, as it will bear a more immediate comparison with the style of some later writers on such subjects. It is of little consequence what passage we take. The following description of the first setting in of winter is perhaps as pleasing as any—

30

“ Through the hushed air the whitening shower descends,
 At first thin wavering, till at last the flakes
 Fall broad, and wide, and fast, dimming the day
 With a continual flow. The cherished fields
 Put on their winter-robe of purest white.

'Tis brightness all, save where the new snow melts
 Along the mazy current. Low the woods
 Bow their hoar head ; and ere the languid Sun
 Faint from the West emits his evening ray,
 Earth's universal face, deep hid and chill,
 Is one wide dazzling waste, that buries wide
 The works of man. Drooping, the labourer-ox
 Stands covered o'er with snow, and then demands
 The fruit of all his toil. The fowls of heaven,
 10 Tamed by the cruel season, crowd around
 The winnowing store, and claim the little boon
 Which Providence assigns them. One alone,
 The redbreast, sacred to the household gods,
 Wisely regardful of the embroiling sky,
 In joyless fields and thorny thickets leaves
 His shivering mates, and pays to trusted man
 His annual visit. Half-afraid, he first
 Against the window beats ; then, brisk, alights
 On the warm hearth ; then, hopping o'er the floor,
 20 Eyes all the smiling family askance,
 And pecks, and starts, and wonders where he is ;
 Till, more familiar grown, the table-crumbs
 Attract his slender feet. The foodless wilds
 Pour forth their brown inhabitants. The hare,
 Though timorous of heart, and hard beset
 By death in various forms, dark snares, and dogs,
 And more unpitying men, the garden seeks,
 Urged on by fearless want. The bleating kind
 Eye the bleak heaven, and next the glistening earth
 30 With looks of dumb despair ; then, sad dispersed,
 Dig for the withered herb through heaps of snow."

It is thus that Thomson always gives a *moral sense* to nature.

Thomson's blank verse is not harsh nor utterly untunable ; but it is heavy and monotonous : it seems always labouring up-hill. The selections which have been made from his works in Enfield's 'Speaker,' and other books of extracts, do not convey the most favourable idea of his genius or taste ; such as Palemon

and Lavinia, Damon and Musidora, Celadon and Amelia. Those parts of any author which are most liable to be stitched in worsted, and framed and glazed, are not by any means always the best. The moral descriptions and reflections in the 'Seasons' are in an admirable spirit, and written with great force and fervour.

His poem on 'Liberty' is not equally good: his Muse was too easy and good-natured for the subject, which required as much indignation against unjust and arbitrary power as complacency in the constitutional monarchy, under which, just after the expulsion of the Stuarts and the establishment of the House of Hanover, in contempt of the claims of hereditary pretenders to the throne, Thomson lived. Thomson was but an indifferent hater; and the most indispensable part of the love of liberty has unfortunately hitherto been the hatred of tyranny. Spleen is the soul of patriotism and of public good; but you would not expect a man who has been seen eating peaches off a tree with both hands in his waistcoat pockets to be "overrun with the spleen," or to heat himself needlessly about an abstract proposition. 10 20

His plays are liable to the same objection. They are never acted and seldom read. The author could not, or would not, put himself out of his way to enter into the situations and passions of others, particularly of a tragic kind. The subject of 'Tancred and Sigismunda,' which is taken from a serious episode in 'Gil Blas,' is an admirable one, but poorly handled: the ground may be considered as still unoccupied. 30

Cowper, whom I shall speak of in this connection, lived at a considerable distance of time after Thomson,

and had some advantages over him, particularly in simplicity of style, in a certain precision and minuteness of graphical description, and in a more careful and leisurely choice of such topics only as his genius and peculiar habits of mind prompted him to treat of. The 'Task' has fewer blemishes than the 'Seasons'; but it has not the same capital excellence, the "unbought grace" of poetry, the power of moving and infusing the warmth of the author's mind into that of
10 the reader. If Cowper had a more polished taste, Thomson had, beyond comparison, a more fertile genius, more impulsive force, a more entire forgetfulness of himself in his subject. If in Thomson you are sometimes offended with the slovenliness of the author by profession, determined to get through his task at all events, in Cowper you are no less dissatisfied with the finicalness of the private gentleman who does not care whether he completes his work or not, and, in whatever he does, is evidently more
20 solicitous to please himself than the public. There is an effeminacy about him which shrinks from and repels common and hearty sympathy. With all his boasted simplicity and love of the country, he seldom launches out into general descriptions of nature: he looks at her over his clipped hedges and from his well-swept garden-walks; or if he makes a bolder experiment now and then, it is with an air of precaution, as if he were afraid of being caught in a shower of rain, or of not being able, in case of any untoward
30 accident, to make good his retreat home. He shakes hands with nature with a pair of fashionable gloves on, and leads his "Vashti" forth to public view with a look of consciousness and attention to etiquette, as a

fine gentleman hands a lady out to dance a minuet. He is delicate to fastidiousness, and glad to get back, after a romantic adventure with crazy Kate, a party of gypsies, or a little child on a common, to the drawing-room and the ladies again, to the sofa and the tea-kettle—No, I beg his pardon, not to the singing, well-scoured tea-kettle, but to the polished and loud-hissing urn. His walks and arbours are kept clear of worms and snails, with as much an appearance of *petit-maîtrerie* as of humanity. He has some of the 10 sickly sensibilities and pampered refinements of Pope; but then Pope prided himself in them, whereas Cowper affects to be all simplicity and plainness. He had neither Thomson's love of the unadorned beauties of nature nor Pope's exquisite sense of the elegancies of art. He was, in fact, a nervous man, afraid of trusting himself to the seductions of the one, and ashamed of putting forward his pretensions to an intimacy with the other; but to be a coward is not the way to succeed either in poetry, in war, or in love! Still, he is a 20 genuine poet, and deserves all his reputation. His worst vices are amiable weaknesses, elegant trifling. Though there is a frequent dryness, timidity, and jejuneness in his manner, he has left a number of pictures of domestic comfort and social refinement as well as of natural imagery and feeling which can hardly be forgotten but with the language itself. Such, among others, are his memorable description of the post coming in, that of the preparations for tea in a winter's evening in the country, of the unexpected fall 30 of snow, of the frosty morning (with the fine satirical transition to the Empress of Russia's palace of ice), and, most of all, the winter's walk at noon. Every one

of these may be considered as distinct studies, or highly-finished cabinet-pieces arranged without order or coherence. I shall be excused for giving the last of them, as what has always appeared to me one of the most feeling, elegant, and perfect specimens of this writer's manner.

“The night was winter in his roughest mood,
The morning sharp and clear. But now at noon,
Upon the southern side of the slant hills,
10 And where the woods fence off the northern blast,
The season smiles, resigning all its rage,
And has the warmth of May. The vault is blue
Without a cloud, and white without a speck
The dazzling splendour of the scene below.
Again the harmony comes o'er the vale ;
And through the trees I view the embattled tower
Whence all the music. I again perceive
The soothing influence of the wafted strains,
And settle in soft musings as I tread
20 The walk, still verdant, under oaks and elms,
Whose outspread branches overarch the glade.
The roof, though movable through all its length
As the wind sways it, has yet well sufficed,
And, intercepting in their silent fall
The frequent flakes, has kept a path for me.
No noise is here, or none that hinders thought.
The redbreast warbles still, but is content
With slender notes, and more than half suppressed :
Pleased with his solitude, and fitting light
30 From spray to spray, where'er he rests he shakes
From many a twig the pendent drops of ice,
That tinkle in the withered leaves below.
Stillness, accompanied with sounds so soft,
Charms more than silence. Meditation here
May think down hours to moments. Here the heart
May give a useful lesson to the head,
And learning wiser grow without his books.
Knowledge and wisdom, far from being one,
Have oft-times no connection. Knowledge dwells

In heads replete with thoughts of other men,
 Wisdom in minds attentive to their own . . .
 Books are not seldom talismans and spells,
 By which the magic art of shrewder wits
 Holds an unthinking multitude enthralled.
 Some to the fascination of a name
 Surrender judgment hoodwinked. Some the style
 Infatuates, and through labyrinths and wilds
 Of error leads them, by a tune entranced.
 While sloth seduces more, too weak to bear 10
 The insupportable fatigue of thought,
 And swallowing therefore, without pause or choice,
 The total grist unsifted, husks and all.
 But trees, and rivulets whose rapid course
 Defies the check of winter, haunts of deer,
 And sheep-walks populous with bleating lambs,
 And lanes in which the primrose ere her time
 Peeps through the moss that clothes the hawthorn root,
 Deceive no student. Wisdom there, and truth,
 Not shy as in the world, and to be won 20
 By slow solicitation, seize at once
 The roving thought, and fix it on themselves."

His satire is also excellent. It is pointed and forcible, with the polished manners of the gentleman and the honest indignation of the virtuous man. His religious poetry, except where it takes a tincture of controversial heat, wants elevation and fire. His Muse had not a seraph's wing. I might refer, in illustration of this opinion, to the laboured anticipation of the Millennium at the end of the sixth book. He could describe a 30
 piece of shell work as well as any modern poet, but he could not describe the New Jerusalem so well as John Bunyan; nor are his verses on Alexander Selkirk so good as 'Robinson Crusoe.' The one is not so much like a vision, nor is the other so much like the reality.

The first volume of Cowper's poems has, however,

been less read than it deserved. The comparison in these poems of the proud and humble believer to the peacock and the pheasant, and the parallel between Voltaire and the poor cottager, are exquisite pieces of eloquence and poetry, particularly the last—

- 10 “Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door,
Pillow and bobbins all her little store,
Content though mean, and cheerful if not gay,
Shuffling her threads about the livelong day,
Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night
Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light ;
She, for her humble sphere by nature fit,
Has little understanding, and no wit,
Receives no praise ; but, though her lot be such
(Toilsome and indigent), she renders much ;
Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true—
A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew ;
And in that charter reads with sparkling eyes
Her title to a treasure in the skies.
- 20 Oh happy peasant ! oh unhappy bard !
His the mere tinsel, hers the rich reward ;
He praised perhaps for ages yet to come,
She never heard of half a mile from home :
He lost in errors his vain heart prefers,
She safe in the simplicity of hers.”

His character of Whitfield, in the poem on ‘Hope,’ is one of the most spirited and striking things. It is written *con amore*.

- 30 “But if, unblamable in word and thought,
A man arise, a man whom God has taught,
With all Elijah’s dignity of tone,
And all the love of the beloved John,
To storm the citadels they built in air,
To smite the untempered wall ’tis death to spare,
To sweep away all refuges of lies,
And place, instead of quirks themselves devise,
Lama Sabachthani before their eyes ;

To prove that without Christ all gain is loss,
 All hope despair, that stands not on His cross ;
 Except the few his God may have impressed,
 A tenfold frenzy seizes all the rest."

These lines were quoted, soon after their appearance, by the Monthly Reviewers to show that Cowper was no poet, though they afterwards took credit to themselves for having been the first to introduce his verses to the notice of the public. It is not a little remarkable that these same critics regularly damned, at its 10 first coming out, every work which has since acquired a standard reputation with the public. Cowper's verses on his mother's picture and his lines to Mary are some of the most pathetic that ever were written. His stanzas on the 'Loss of the Royal George' have a masculine strength and feeling beyond what was usual with him. 'The story of 'John Gilpin' has perhaps given as much pleasure to as many people as anything of the same length that ever was written.

His life was an unhappy one. It was embittered by 20 a morbid affection and by his religious sentiments. Nor are we to wonder at this, or bring it as a charge against religion ; for it is the nature of the poetical temperament to carry everything to excess, whether it be love, religion, pleasure, or pain, as we may see in the case of Cowper and of Burns, and to find torment or rapture in that in which others merely find a resource from *ennui*, or a relaxation from common occupation.

IX.

WORDSWORTH.

MR WORDSWORTH'S genius is a pure emanation of the Spirit of the Age. Had he lived in any other period of the world he would never have been heard of. As it is, he has some difficulty to contend with the hebetude of his intellect and the meanness of his subject. With him "lowliness is young ambition's ladder"; but he finds it a toil to climb in this way the steep of Fame. His homely Muse can hardly raise her wing from the ground nor spread her hidden
 10 glories to the sun. He has "no figures nor no fantasies, which busy *passion* draws in the brains of men": neither the gorgeous machinery of mythologic lore, nor the splendid colours of poetic diction. His style is vernacular: he delivers household truths. He sees nothing loftier than human hopes, nothing deeper than the human heart. This he probes, this he tampers with, this he poises, with all its incalculable weight of thought and feeling, in his hands, and at the same time calms the throbbing pulses of his own
 20 heart by keeping his eye ever fixed on the face of nature. If he can make the life-blood flow from the wounded breast, this is the living colouring with which he paints his verse: if he can assuage the pain or close

up the wound with the balm of solitary musing, or the healing power of plants and herbs and "skyey influences," this is the sole triumph of his art. He takes the simplest elements of nature and of the human mind, the mere abstract conditions inseparable from our being, and tries to compound a new system of poetry from them—and has perhaps succeeded as well as any one could. "*Nihil humani a me alienum puto*" is the motto of his works. He thinks nothing low or indifferent of which this can be affirmed : every- 10
thing that professes to be more than this, that is not an absolute essence of truth and feeling, he holds to be vitiated, false, and spurious. In a word, his poetry is founded on setting up an opposition (and pushing it to the utmost length) between the natural and the artificial, between the spirit of humanity and the spirit of fashion and of the world !

It is one of the innovations of the time. It partakes of, and is carried along with, the revolutionary movement of our age : the political changes of the day were 20
the model on which he formed and conducted his poetical experiments. His Muse (it cannot be denied, and without this we cannot explain its character at all) is a levelling one. It proceeds on a principle of equality, and strives to reduce all things to the same standard. It is distinguished by a proud humility. It relies upon its own resources, and disdains external show and relief. It takes the commonest events and objects as a test to prove that nature is always interesting from its inherent truth and beauty, without 30
any of the ornaments of dress or pomp of circumstances to set it off. Hence the unaccountable mixture of seeming simplicity and real abstruseness in the 'Lyrical

Ballads.' Fools have laughed at, wise men scarcely understand them. He takes a subject or a story merely as pegs or loops to hang thought and feeling on: the incidents are trifling in proportion to his contempt for imposing appearances; the reflections are profound according to the gravity and the aspiring pretensions of his mind.

His popular inartificial style gets rid (at a blow) of all the trappings of verse, of all the high places of
10 poetry: "the cloud-capt towers, the solemn temples, the gorgeous palaces," are swept to the ground, and, "like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wreck behind." All the traditions of learning, all the superstitions of age, are obliterated and effaced. We begin *de novo* on a *tabula rasa* of poetry. The purple pall, the nodding plume of tragedy, are exploded as mere pantomime and trick, to return to the simplicity of truth and nature. Kings, queens, priests, nobles, the altar and the throne, the distinctions of rank, birth,
20 wealth, power, "the judge's robe, the marshal's truncheon, the ceremony that to great ones 'longs," are not to be found here. The author tramples on the pride of art with greater pride. The Ode and Epode, the Strophe and Antistrophe, he laughs to scorn. The harp of Homer, the trump of Pindar and of Alcæus, are still. The decencies of costume, the decorations of vanity, are stripped off without mercy as barbarous, idle, and Gothic. The jewels in the crisped hair, the diadem on the polished brow, are thought meretricious,
30 theatrical, vulgar; and nothing contents his fastidious taste beyond a simple garland of flowers. Neither does he avail himself of the advantages which nature or accident holds out to him. He chooses to have his

subject a foil to his invention, to owe nothing but to himself. He gathers manna in the wilderness, he strikes the barren rock for the gushing moisture. He elevates the mean by the strength of his own aspirations ; he clothes the naked with beauty and grandeur from the stores of his own recollections. No cypress grove loads his verse with funereal pomp ; but his imagination lends "a sense of joy"

"To the bare trees and mountains bare,
And grass in the green field."

10

No storm, no shipwreck startles us by its horrors ; but the rainbow lifts its head in the cloud, and the breeze sighs through the withered fern. No sad vicissitude of fate, no overwhelming catastrophe in nature, deforms his page ; but the dew-drop glitters on the bending flower, the tear collects in the glistening eye.

"Beneath the hills, along the flowery vales,
The generations are prepared ; the pangs,
The internal pangs are ready ; the dread strife
Of poor humanity's afflicted will,
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny."

20

As the lark ascends from its low bed on fluttering wing and salutes the morning skies, so Mr Wordsworth's unpretending Muse, in russet guise, scales the summits of reflection, while it makes the round earth its footstool, and its home !

Possibly a good deal of this may be regarded as the effect of disappointed views and an inverted ambition. Prevented by native pride and indolence from climbing the ascent of learning or greatness ; taught by political opinions to say to the vain pomp and glory of the world, "I hate ye" ; seeing the path of classical and artificial poetry blocked up by the cumbrous ornaments

30

of style and turgid *commonplaces*, so that nothing more could be achieved in that direction but by the most ridiculous bombast or the tamest servility,—he has turned back partly from the bias of his mind, partly perhaps from a judicious policy, has struck into the sequestered vale of humble life, sought out the Muse among sheep-cotes and hamlets and the peasant's mountain-haunts, has discarded all the tinsel pageantry of verse, and endeavoured (not in vain) to aggrandise
10 the trivial and add the charm of novelty to the familiar. No one has shown the same imagination in raising trifles into importance : no one has displayed the same pathos in treating of the simplest feelings of the heart. Reserved, yet haughty, having no unruly or violent passions (or those passions having been early suppressed), Mr Wordsworth has passed his life in solitary musing or in daily converse with the face of nature. He exemplifies in an eminent degree the power of
20 *association* ; for his poetry has no other source or character. He has dwelt among pastoral scenes till each object has become connected with a thousand feelings, a link in the chain of thought, a fibre of his own heart. Every one is by habit and familiarity strongly attached to the place of his birth or to objects that recall the most pleasing and eventful circumstances of his life. But to the author of the 'Lyrical Ballads' nature is a kind of home, and he may be said to take a personal interest in the universe. There is no image so insignificant that it has not in some mood or other
30 found the way into his heart : no sound that does not awaken the memory of other years.

"To him the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

The daisy looks up to him with sparkling eye as an old acquaintance ; the cuckoo haunts him with sounds of early youth not to be expressed ; a linnet's nest startles him with boyish delight ; an old withered thorn is weighed down with a heap of recollections ; a grey cloak, seen on some wild moor, torn by the wind or drenched in the rain, afterwards becomes an object of imagination to him ; even the lichens on the rock have a life and being in his thoughts. He has described all these objects in a way and with an intensity of feeling that no one else had done before him, and has given a new view or aspect of nature. He is in this sense the most original poet now living, and the one whose writings could the least be spared—for they have no substitute elsewhere. The vulgar do not read them, the learned who see all things through books do not understand them, the great despise, the fashionable may ridicule them ; but the author has created himself an interest in the heart of the retired and lonely student of nature which can never die. Persons of this class will still continue to feel what he has felt : he has expressed what they might in vain wish to express, except with glistening eye and faltering tongue ! There is a lofty philosophic tone, a thoughtful humanity, infused into his pastoral vein. Remote from the passions and events of the great world, he has communicated interest and dignity to the primal movements of the heart of man, and ingrafted his own conscious reflections on the casual thoughts of hinds and shepherds. Nursed amidst the grandeur of mountain scenery, he has stooped to have a nearer view of the daisy under his feet, or plucked a branch of white-thorn from the spray ; but in describing it his mind seems

imbued with the majesty and solemnity of the objects around him : the tall rock lifts its head in the erectness of his spirit ; the cataract roars in the sound of his verse ; and in its din and mysterious meaning the mists seem to gather in the hollows of Helvellyn, and the forked Skiddaw hovers in the distance. There is little mention of mountainous scenery in Mr Wordsworth's poetry ; but by internal evidence one might be almost sure that it was written in a mountainous
 10 country from its bareness, its simplicity, its loftiness, and its depth !

His later philosophic productions have a somewhat different character. They are a departure from, a dereliction of, his first principles. They are classical and courtly. They are polished in style without being gaudy, dignified in subject without affectation. They seem to have been composed not in a cottage at Grasmere, but among the half-inspired groves and stately recollections of Cole-Orton. We might allude
 20 in particular, for examples of what we mean, to the lines on a picture by Claude Lorraine, and to the exquisite poem entitled 'Laodamia.' The last of these breathes the pure spirit of the finest fragments of antiquity—the sweetness, the gravity, the strength, the beauty, and the languor of death,

“Calm contemplation and majestic pains.”

Its glossy brilliancy arises from the perfection of the finishing, like that of careful sculpture, not from gaudy colouring : the texture of the thoughts has the smooth-
 30 ness and solidity of marble. It is a poem that might be read aloud in Elysium, and the spirits of departed heroes and sages would gather round to listen to it !

Mr Wordsworth's philosophic poetry, with a less glowing aspect and less tumult in the veins than Lord Byron's on similar occasions, bends a calmer and keener eye on mortality; the impression, if less vivid, is more pleasing and permanent; and we confess it (perhaps it is a want of taste and proper feeling) that there are lines and poems of our author's that we think of ten times for once that we recur to any of Lord Byron's. Or if there are any of the latter's writings that we can dwell upon in the same way—that is, as 10 lasting and heartfelt sentiments—it is when, laying aside his usual pomp and pretension, he descends with Mr Wordsworth to the common ground of a disinterested humanity. It may be considered as characteristic of our poet's writings that they either make no impression on the mind at all, seem mere *nonsense-verses*, or that they leave a mark behind them that never wears out. They either

“Fall blunted from the indurated breast”

without any perceptible result, or they absorb it like a 20 passion. To one class of readers he appears sublime, to another (and we fear the largest) ridiculous. He has probably realised Milton's wish, “and fit audience found, though few”; but we suspect he is not reconciled to the alternative. There are delightful passages in the ‘Excursion,’ both of natural description and of inspired reflection (passages of the latter kind that in the sound of the thoughts and of the swelling language resemble heavenly symphonies, mournful requiems over the grave of human hopes); but we must add, in 30 justice and in sincerity, that we think it impossible that this work should ever become popular, even in the

same degree as the 'Lyrical Ballads.' It affects a system without having any intelligible clue to one ; and, instead of unfolding a principle in various and striking lights, repeats the same conclusions till they become flat and insipid. Mr Wordsworth's mind is obtuse, except as it is the organ and the receptacle of accumulated feelings ; it is not analytic, but synthetic ; it is reflecting rather than theoretical. The 'Excursion,' we believe, fell still-born from the press. There
10 was something abortive, and clumsy, and ill-judged in the attempt. It was long and laboured. The personages for the most part were low, the fare rustic : the plan raised expectations which were not fulfilled, and the effect was like being ushered into a stately hall and invited to sit down to a splendid banquet in the company of clowns, and with nothing but successive courses of apple-dumplings served up. It was not even *toujours perdrix !*

Mr Wordsworth in his person is above the middle
20 size, with marked features and an air somewhat stately and Quixotic. He reminds one of some of Holbein's heads—grave, saturnine, with a slight indication of sly humour, kept under by the manners of the age or by the pretensions of the person. He has a peculiar sweetness in his smile, and great depth and manliness and a rugged harmony in the tones of his voice. His manner of reading his own poetry is particularly imposing ; and in his favourite passages his eye beams with preternatural lustre, and the meaning labours
30 slowly up from his swelling breast. No one who has seen him at these moments could go away with an impression that he was a "man of no mark or likelihood." Perhaps the comment of his face and

voice is necessary to convey a full idea of his poetry. His language may not be intelligible, but his manner is not to be mistaken. It is clear that he is either mad or inspired. In company, even in a *tête-à-tête*, Mr Wordsworth is often silent, indolent, and reserved. If he is become verbose and oracular of late years, he was not so in his better days. He threw out a bold or an indifferent remark without either effort or pretension, and relapsed into musing again. He shone most (because he seemed most roused and animated) in 10 reciting his own poetry or in talking about it. He sometimes gave striking views of his feelings and trains of association in composing certain passages; or if one did not always understand his distinctions, still there was no want of interest—there was a latent meaning worth inquiring into, like a vein of ore that one cannot exactly hit upon at the moment, but of which there are sure indications. His standard of poetry is high and severe, almost to exclusiveness. He admits of nothing below, scarcely of anything 20 above himself. It is fine to hear him talk of the way in which certain subjects should have been treated by eminent poets, according to his notions of the art. Thus he finds fault with Dryden's description of Bacchus in the 'Alexander's Feast,' as if he were a mere good-looking youth or boon companion—

“Flushed with a purple grace,
He shows his honest face”—

instead of representing the god returning from the conquest of India, crowned with vine-leaves, and 30 drawn by panthers, and followed by troops of satyrs, of wild men and animals that he had tamed. You

would think, in hearing him speak on this subject, that you saw Titian's picture of the meeting of Bacchus and Ariadne, so classic were his conceptions, so glowing his style. Milton is his great idol, and he sometimes dares to compare himself with him. His sonnets, indeed, have something of the same high-raised tone and prophetic spirit. Chaucer is another prime favourite of his, and he has been at the pains to modernise some of the 'Canterbury Tales.' Those
 10 persons who look upon Mr Wordsworth as a merely puerile writer must be rather at a loss to account for his strong predilection for such geniuses as Dante and Michael Angelo. We do not think our author has any very cordial sympathy with Shakespeare. How should he? Shakespeare was the least of an egotist of anybody in the world. He does not much relish the variety and scope of dramatic composition. "He hates those interlocutions between Lucius and Caius." Yet Mr Wordsworth himself wrote a tragedy when he
 20 was young ; and we have heard the following energetic lines quoted from it, as put into the mouth of a person smit with remorse for some rash crime—

" Action is momentary,
 The motion of a muscle this way or that ;
 Suffering is long, obscure, and infinite."

Perhaps for want of light and shade, and the unshackled spirit of the drama, this performance was never brought forward. Our critic has a great dislike to Gray, and a fondness for Thomson and Collins. It
 30 is mortifying to hear him speak of Pope and Dryden, whom, because they have been supposed to have all the possible excellencies of poetry, he will allow to have

none. Nothing, however, can be fairer or more amusing than the way in which he sometimes exposes the unmeaning verbiage of modern poetry. Thus, in the beginning of Dr Johnson's 'Vanity of Human Wishes'—

“ Let observation with extensive view
Survey mankind from China to Peru ”—

he says there is a total want of imagination accompanying the words: the same idea is repeated three times under the disguise of a different phraseology: it comes 10 to this—“ Let *observation*, with extensive *observation*, *observe* mankind ”; or take away the first line, and the second—

“ Survey mankind from China to Peru ”—

literally conveys the whole. Mr Wordsworth is, we must say, a perfect Drawcansir as to prose writers. He complains of the dry reasoners and matter-of-fact people for their want of *passion*; and he is jealous of the rhetorical declaimers and rhapsodists as trenching 20 on the province of poetry. He condemns all French writers (as well of poetry as prose) in the lump. His list in this way is indeed small. He approves of Walton's 'Angler,' Paley, and some other writers of an inoffensive modesty of pretension. He also likes books of voyages and travels, and 'Robinson Crusoe.' In art he greatly esteems Bewick's woodcuts and Waterloo's sylvan etchings. But he sometimes takes 30 a higher tone and gives his mind fair play. We have known him enlarge with a noble intelligence and enthusiasm on Nicolas Poussin's fine landscape compositions, pointing out the unity of design that pervades

them, the superintending mind, the imaginative principle that brings all to bear on the same end ; and declaring he would not give a rush for any landscape that did not express the time of day, the climate, the period of the world it was meant to illustrate, or had not this character of *wholeness* in it. His eye also does justice to Rembrandt's fine and masterly effects. In the way in which that artist works something out of nothing, and transforms the stump of a tree, a common
10 figure, into an *ideal* object by the gorgeous light and shade thrown upon it, he perceives an analogy to his own mode of investing the minute details of nature with an atmosphere of sentiment, and in pronouncing Rembrandt to be a man of genius, feels that he strengthens his own claim to the title. It has been said of Mr Wordsworth that "he hates conchology, that he hates the Venus of Medicis." But these, we hope, are mere epigrams and *jeux-d'esprit*, as far from truth as they are free from malice ; a sort of running
20 satire or critical clenches

" Where one for sense and one for rhyme
Is quite sufficient at one time."

We think, however, that if Mr Wordsworth had been a more liberal and candid critic, he would have been a more sterling writer. If a greater number of sources of pleasure had been open to him, he would have communicated pleasure to the world more frequently. Had he been less fastidious in pronouncing sentence on the works of others, his own would have been
30 received more favourably and treated more leniently. The current of his feelings is deep, but narrow ; the range of his understanding is lofty and aspiring rather

than discursive. The force, the originality, the absolute truth and identity with which he feels some things, make him indifferent to so many others. The simplicity and enthusiasm of his feelings, with respect to nature, renders him bigoted and intolerant in his judgments of men and things. But it happens to him, as to others, that his strength lies in his weakness; and perhaps we have no right to complain. We might get rid of the cynic and the egotist and find in his stead a commonplace man. We should "take the 10 good the gods provide us": a fine and original vein of poetry is not one of their most contemptible gifts, and the rest is scarcely worth thinking of, except as it may be a mortification to those who expect perfection from human nature, or who have been idle enough at some period of their lives to deify men of genius as possessing claims above it. But this is a chord that jars, and we shall not dwell upon it.

Lord Byron we have called, according to the old proverb, "the spoiled child of fortune": Mr Words- 20 worth might plead, in mitigation of some peculiarities, that he is "the spoiled child of disappointment." We are convinced, if he had been early a popular poet, he would have borne his honours meekly, and would have been a person of great *bonhomie* and frankness of disposition. But the sense of injustice and of undeserved ridicule sours the temper and narrows the views. To have produced works of genius and to find them neglected or treated with scorn is one of the heaviest trials of human patience. We exaggerate our own 30 merits when they are denied by others, and are apt to grudge and cavil at every particle of praise bestowed on those to whom we feel a conscious superiority. In

mere self-defence we turn against the world when it turns against us, brood over the undeserved slights we receive ; and thus the genial current of the soul is stopped, or vents itself in effusions of petulance and self-conceit. Mr Wordsworth has thought too much of contemporary critics and criticism and less than he ought of the award of posterity, and of the opinion, we do not say of private friends, but of those who were made so by their admiration of his genius. He did
10 not court popularity by a conformity to established models, and he ought not to have been surprised that his originality was not understood as a matter of course. He has *gnawed too much on the bridle*, and has often thrown out crusts to the critics, in mere defiance or as a point of honour when he was challenged, which otherwise his own good sense would have withheld. We suspect that Mr Wordsworth's feelings are a little morbid in this respect, or that he resents censure more than he is gratified by praise. Otherwise
20 the tide has turned much in his favour of late years ; he has a large body of determined partisans, and is at present sufficiently in request with the public to save or relieve him from the last necessity to which a man of genius can be reduced—that of becoming the god
25 of his own idolatry !

X.

MY FIRST ACQUAINTANCE WITH POETS.

My father was a dissenting minister at Wem, in Shropshire; and in the year 1798 (the figures that compose that date are to me like the "dreaded name of Demogorgon") Mr Coleridge came to Shrewsbury to succeed Mr Rowe in the spiritual charge of a Unitarian congregation there. He did not come till late on the Saturday afternoon before he was to preach; and Mr Rowe, who himself went down to the coach in a state of anxiety and expectation to look for the arrival of his successor, could find no one at all answering the description but a round-faced man in a short black coat (like a shooting jacket) which hardly seemed to have been made for him, but who seemed to be talking at a great rate to his fellow-passengers. Mr Rowe had scarce returned to give an account of his disappointment when the round-faced man in black entered and dissipated all doubts on the subject by beginning to talk. He did not cease while he stayed; nor has he since, that I know of. He held the good town of Shrewsbury in delightful suspense for three weeks that he remained there "fluttering the *proud Salopians*, like an eagle in a dove-cote"; and the Welsh mountains that skirt

the horizon with their tempestuous confusion agree to have heard no such mystic sounds since the days of

“High-born Hoel’s harp or soft Llewellyn’s lay”!

As we passed along between Wem and Shrewsbury, and I eyed their blue tops seen through the wintry branches, or the red rustling leaves of the sturdy oak-trees by the road-side, a sound was in my ears as of a Siren’s song: I was stunned, startled with it, as from deep sleep; but I had no notion then that I should
10 ever be able to express my admiration to others in motley imagery or quaint allusion till the light of his genius shone into my soul like the sun’s rays glittering in the puddles of the road. I was at that time dumb, inarticulate, helpless, like a worm by the wayside, crushed, bleeding, lifeless; but now, bursting from the deadly bands that “bound them,

“With Styx nine times round them,”

my ideas float on winged words, and as they expand their plumes catch the golden light of other years.
20 My soul has indeed remained in its original bondage, dark, obscure, with longings infinite and unsatisfied; my heart, shut up in the prison-house of this rude clay, has never found, nor will it ever find, a heart to speak to; but that my understanding also did not remain dumb and brutish, or at length found a language to express itself, I owe to Coleridge. But this is not to my purpose.

My father lived ten miles from Shrewsbury, and was in the habit of exchanging visits with Mr Rowe and
30 with Mr Jenkins of Whitchurch (nine miles farther on), according to the custom of dissenting ministers

in each other's neighbourhood. A line of communication is thus established by which the flame of civil and religious liberty is kept alive, and nourishes its smouldering fire unquenchable, like the fires in the 'Agamemnon' of Æschylus, placed at different stations, that waited for ten long years to announce with their blazing pyramids the destruction of Troy. Coleridge had agreed to come over and see my father, according to the courtesy of the country, as Mr Rowe's probable successor; but, in the meantime, I had gone to hear 10 him preach the Sunday after his arrival. A poet and a philosopher getting up into a Unitarian pulpit to preach the gospel was a romance in these degenerate days, a sort of revival of the primitive spirit of Christianity, which was not to be resisted.

It was in January, 1798, that I rose one morning before daylight to walk ten miles in the mud to hear this celebrated person preach. Never, the longest day I have to live, shall I have such another walk as this cold, raw, comfortless one, in the winter of the year 20 1798. *Il y a des impressions que ni le temps ni les circonstances peuvent effacer. Dusse-je vivre des siècles entiers, le doux temps de ma jeunesse ne peut renaitre pour moi, ni s'effacer jamais dans ma mémoire.* When I got there, the organ was playing the 100th psalm, and when it was done Mr Coleridge rose and gave out his text, "And he went up into the mountain to pray, HIMSELF, ALONE." As he gave out his text, his voice "rose like a stream of rich distilled perfumes"; and when he came to the two last words, which he 30 pronounced loud, deep, and distinct, it seemed to me, who was then young, as if the sounds had echoed from the bottom of the human heart, and as if that prayer

might have floated in solemn silence through the universe. The idea of St John came into my mind, "of one crying in the wilderness, who had his loins girt about, and whose food was locusts and wild honey." The preacher then launched into his subject, like an eagle dallying with the wind. The sermon was upon peace and war; upon church and state—not their alliance, but their separation; on the spirit of the world and the spirit of Christianity—not as the
10 same, but as opposed to one another. He talked of those who had "inscribed the cross of Christ on banners dripping with human gore." He made a poetical and pastoral excursion; and, to show the fatal effects of war, drew a striking contrast between the simple shepherd boy driving his team afield or sitting under the hawthorn piping to his flock, "as though he should never be old," and the same poor country lad, crimped, kidnapped, brought into town, made drunk at an alehouse, turned into a wretched drummer-
20 boy, with his hair sticking on end with powder and pomatum, a long cue at his back, and tricked out in the loathsome finery of the profession of blood.

"Such were the notes our once-loved poet sung."

And for myself, I could not have been more delighted if I had heard the music of the spheres. Poetry and philosophy had met together, Truth and Genius had embraced, under the eye and with the sanction of Religion. This was even beyond my hopes. I returned home well satisfied. The sun that was still
30 labouring pale and wan through the sky, obscured by thick mists, seemed an emblem of the *good cause*; and the cold dank drops of dew that hung half-melted

on the beard of the thistle had something genial and refreshing in them ; for there was a spirit of hope and youth in all nature that turned everything into good. The face of nature had not then the brand of JUS DIVINUM on it—

“Like to that sanguine flower inscribed with woe.”

On the Tuesday following, the half-inspired speaker came. I was called down into the room where he was, and went half-hoping, half-afraid. He received me very graciously, and I listened for a long time 10 without uttering a word. I did not suffer in his opinion by my silence. “For those two hours,” he afterwards was pleased to say, “he was conversing with William Hazlitt’s forehead!” His appearance was different from what I had anticipated from seeing him before. At a distance, and in the dim light of the chapel, there was to me a strange wildness in his aspect, a dusky obscurity, and I thought him pitted with the small-pox. His complexion was at that time clear and even bright— 20

“As are the children of yon azure sheen.”

His forehead was broad and high, light as if built of ivory, with large projecting eyebrows, and his eyes rolling beneath them like a sea with darkened lustre. “A certain tender bloom his face o’erspread,” a purple tinge as we see it in the pale thoughtful complexions of the Spanish portrait-painters, Murillo and Velasquez. His mouth was gross, voluptuous, open, eloquent ; his chin good-humoured and round ; but his nose, the rudder of the face, the index of 30 the will, was small, feeble, nothing—like what he

- has done. It might seem that the genius of his face as from a height surveyed and projected him (with sufficient capacity and huge aspiration) into the world unknown of thought and imagination with nothing to support or guide his veering purpose, as if Columbus had launched his adventurous course for the New World in a scallop without oars or compass. So, at least, I comment on it after the event. Coleridge, in his person, was rather above the common
- 10 size, inclining to the corpulent, or, like Lord Hamlet, "somewhat fat and pury." His hair (now, alas! grey) was then black and glossy as the raven's, and fell in smooth masses over his forehead. This long pendulous hair is peculiar to enthusiasts, to those whose minds tend heavenward, and is traditionally inseparable (though of a different colour) from the pictures of Christ. It ought to belong, as a character, to all who preach *Christ crucified*, and Coleridge was at that time one of those!
- 20 It was curious to observe the contrast between him and my father, who was a veteran in the cause, and then declining into the vale of years. He had been a poor Irish lad, carefully brought up by his parents, and sent to the University of Glasgow (where he studied under Adam Smith) to prepare him for his future destination. It was his mother's proudest wish to see her son a dissenting minister. So, if we look back to past generations (as far as eye can reach), we see the same hopes, fears, wishes, followed by the same
- 30 disappointments, throbbing in the human heart; and so we may see them (if we look forward) rising up for ever, and disappearing like vapourish bubbles in the human breast! After being tossed about from con-

gregation to congregation in the heats of the Unitarian controversy and squabbles about the American war, he had been relegated to an obscure village, where he was to spend the last thirty years of his life, far from the only converse that he loved, the talk about disputed texts of Scripture and the cause of civil and religious liberty. Here he passed his days repining, but resigned, in the study of the Bible and the perusal of the commentators,—huge folios, not easily got through, one of which would outlast a winter! Why 10 did he pore on these from morn to night (with the exception of a walk in the fields or a turn in the garden to gather broccoli-plants or kidney beans of his own rearing, with no small degree of pride and pleasure)? Here were “no figures nor no fantasies,”—neither poetry nor philosophy—nothing to dazzle, nothing to excite modern curiosity; but to his lack-lustre eyes there appeared within the pages of the ponderous, unwieldy, neglected tomes the sacred name of JEHOVAH in Hebrew capitals: pressed down 20 by the weight of the style, worn to the last fading thinness of the understanding, there were glimpses, glimmering notions, of the patriarchal wanderings, with palm-trees hovering in the horizon, and processions of camels at the distance of three thousand years; there was Moses with the burning bush, the number of the Twelve Tribes, types, shadows, glosses on the law and the prophets; there were discussions (dull enough) on the age of Methuselah, a mighty speculation! there were outlines, rude guesses at the shape 30 of Noah’s Ark and at the riches of Solomon’s Temple; questions as to the date of the creation, predictions of the end of all things; the great lapses of time, the

strange mutations of the globe, were unfolded with the voluminous leaf, as it turned over; and though the soul might slumber with an hieroglyphic veil of inscrutable mysteries drawn over it, yet it was in a slumber ill exchanged for all the sharpened realities of sense, wit, fancy, or reason. My father's life was comparatively a dream; but it was a dream of infinity and eternity, of death, the resurrection, and a judgment to come!

- 10 No two individuals were ever more unlike than were the host and his guest. A poet was to my father a sort of nondescript; yet whatever added grace to the Unitarian cause was to him welcome. He could hardly have been more surprised or pleased if our visitor had worn wings. Indeed, his thoughts had wings; and as the silken sounds rustled round our little wainscoted parlour, my father threw back his spectacles over his forehead, his white hairs mixing with its sanguine hue, and a smile of delight beamed
20 across his rugged cordial face to think that Truth had found a new ally in Fancy!¹ Besides, Coleridge seemed to take considerable notice of me, and that of itself was enough. He talked very familiarly, but agreeably, and glanced over a variety of subjects. At dinner-time he grew more animated, and dilated in a very edifying manner on Mary Wollstonecraft and Mackintosh. The last, he said, he considered (on my father's speaking of his '*Vindiciæ Gallicæ*' as a

¹ My father was one of those who mistook his talent after all. He used to be very much dissatisfied that I preferred his Letters to his Sermons. The last were forced and dry: the first came naturally from him. For ease, half-plays on words, and a supine, monkish, indolent pleasantry, I have never seen them equalled.

capital performance) as a clever scholastic man—a master of the topics, or as the ready warehouseman of letters who knew exactly where to lay his hand on what he wanted, though the goods were not his own. He thought him no match for Burke either in style or matter. Burke was a metaphysician, Mackintosh a mere logician. Burke was an orator (almost a poet) who reasoned in figures, because he had an eye for nature: Mackintosh, on the other hand, was a rhetorician who had only an eye to commonplaces. On this 10 I ventured to say that I had always entertained a great opinion of Burke, and that (as far as I could find) the speaking of him with contempt might be made the test of a vulgar democratical mind. This was the first observation I ever made to Coleridge, and he said it was a very just and striking one. I remember the leg of Welsh mutton and the turnips on the table that day had the finest flavour imaginable. Coleridge added that Mackintosh and Tom Wedgwood (of whom, however, he spoke highly) had expressed a very in- 20 different opinion of his friend Mr Wordsworth, on which he remarked to them, “He strides on so far before you that he dwindles in the distance!” Godwin had once boasted to him of having carried on an argument with Mackintosh for three hours with dubious success; Coleridge told him, “If there had been a man of genius in the room, he would have settled the question in five minutes.” He asked me if I had ever seen Mary Wollstonecraft, and I said I had once for a few moments, and that she seemed to 30 me to turn off Godwin’s objection to something she advanced with quite a playful, easy air. He replied that “this was only one instance of the ascendancy

which people of imagination exercised over those of mere intellect." He did not rate Godwin very high¹ (this was caprice or prejudice, real or affected), but he had a great idea of Mrs Wollstonecraft's powers of conversation—none at all of her talent for book-making. We talked a little about Holcroft. He had been asked if he was not much struck *with* him, and he said he thought himself in more danger of being struck *by* him. I complained that he would not let
10 me get on at all, for he required a definition of every the commonest word, exclaiming, "What do you mean by a *sensation*, sir? What do you mean by an *idea*?" This, Coleridge said, was barricading the road to truth; it was setting up a turnpike-gate at every step we took. I forget a great number of things, many more than I remember; but the day passed off pleasantly, and the next morning Mr Coleridge was to return to Shrewsbury. When I came down to breakfast, I found that he had just received a letter
20 from his friend, T. Wedgwood, making him an offer of £150 a-year if he chose to waive his present pursuit and devote himself entirely to the study of poetry and philosophy. Coleridge seemed to make up his mind to close with this proposal in the act of tying on one of his shoes. It threw an additional damp on his departure. It took the wayward enthusiast quite from us to cast him into Deva's winding vales, or by the shores of old romance. Instead of

¹ He complained in particular of the presumption of his attempting to establish the future immortality of man, "without" (as he said) "knowing what Death was or what Life was"; and the tone in which he pronounced these two words seemed to convey a complete image of both.

living at ten miles' distance, of being the pastor of a dissenting congregation at Shrewsbury, he was henceforth to inhabit the Hill of Parnassus, to be a Shepherd on the Delectable Mountains. Alas! I knew not the way thither, and felt very little gratitude for Mr Wedgwood's bounty. I was presently relieved from this dilemma; for Mr Coleridge, asking for a pen and ink and going to a table to write something on a bit of card, advanced towards me with undulating step, and, giving me the precious document, said that that 10 was his address, *Mr Coleridge, Nether Stowey, Somersetshire*, and that he should be glad to see me there in a few weeks' time, and, if I chose, would come half-way to meet me. I was not less surprised than the shepherd boy (this simile is to be found in 'Cassandra') when he sees a thunderbolt fall close at his feet. I stammered out my acknowledgments and acceptance of this offer (I thought Mr Wedgwood's annuity a trifle to it) as well as I could; and this mighty business being settled, the poet-preacher took leave, 20 and I accompanied him six miles on the road. It was a fine morning in the middle of winter, and he talked the whole way. The scholar in Chaucer is described as going

"Sounding on his way."

So Coleridge went on his. In digressing, in dilating, in passing from subject to subject, he appeared to me to float in air, to slide on ice. He told me in confidence (going along) that he should have preached 30 two sermons before he accepted the situation at Shrewsbury—one on Infant Baptism, the other on the Lord's Supper, showing that he could not administer either,

which would have effectually disqualified him for the object in view. I observed that he continually crossed me on the way by shifting from one side of the foot-path to the other. This struck me as an odd movement; but I did not at that time connect it with any instability of purpose or involuntary change of principle, as I have done since. He seemed unable to keep on in a straight line. He spoke slightly of Hume (whose 'Essay on Miracles,' he said, was stolen from
10 an objection started in one of South's sermons—*Credat Judæus Apella!*). I was not very much pleased at this account of Hume, for I had just been reading with infinite relish that completest of all metaphysical *choke-pears*, his 'Treatise on Human Nature,' to which the 'Essays,' in point of scholastic subtilty and close reasoning, are mere elegant trifling, light summer reading. Coleridge even denied the excellence of Hume's general style, which I think betrayed a want of taste or candour. He however made me amends
20 by the manner in which he spoke of Berkeley. He dwelt particularly on his 'Essay on Vision' as a masterpiece of analytical reasoning. So it undoubtedly is. He was exceedingly angry with Dr Johnson for striking the stone with his foot, in allusion to this author's Theory of Matter and Spirit, and saying, "Thus I confute him, sir." Coleridge drew a parallel (I don't know how he brought about the connection) between Bishop Berkeley and Tom Paine. He said the one was an instance of a subtle, the other of an acute mind,
30 than which no two things could be more distinct. The one was a shop-boy's quality, the other the characteristic of a philosopher. He considered Bishop Butler as a true philosopher, a profound and con-

scientious thinker, a genuine reader of nature and of his own mind. He did not speak of his 'Analogy,' but of his 'Sermons at the Rolls' Chapel,' of which I had never heard. Coleridge somehow always contrived to prefer the *unknown* to the *known*. In this instance he was right. The 'Analogy' is a tissue of sophistry, of wire-drawn, theological special pleading: the 'Sermons' (with the Preface to them) are in a fine vein of deep, matured reflection, a candid appeal to our observation of human nature, without pedantry and without bias. I told Coleridge I had written a few remarks, and was sometimes foolish enough to believe that I had made a discovery on the same subject (the 'Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind'); and I tried to explain my view of it to Coleridge, who listened with great willingness, but I did not succeed in making myself understood. I sat down to the task shortly afterwards for the twentieth time, got new pens and paper, determined to make clear work of it, wrote a few meagre sentences in the skeleton style of a mathematical demonstration, stopped half-way down the second page; and after trying in vain to pump up any words, images, notions, apprehensions, facts, or observations from that gulf of abstraction in which I had plunged myself for four or five years preceding, gave up the attempt as labour in vain, and shed tears of helpless despondency on the blank unfinished paper. I can write fast enough now. Am I better than I was then? Oh no! One truth discovered one pang of regret at not being able to express it, is better than all the fluency and flippancy in the world. Would that I could go back to what I then was! Why can we not revive past times as we can revisit old places?

- If I had the quaint Muse of Sir Philip Sidney to assist me, I would write a Sonnet to the Road between Wem and Shrewsbury, and immortalise every step of it by some fond enigmatical conceit. I would swear that the very milestones had ears, and that Harmerhill stooped with all its pines to listen to a poet as he passed! I remember but one other topic of discourse in this walk. He mentioned Paley, praised the naturalness and clearness of his style, but condemned his
- 10 sentiments, thought him a mere time-serving casuist, and said that "the fact of his work on 'Moral and Political Philosophy' being made a text-book in our Universities was a disgrace to the national character." We parted at the six-mile stone; and I returned homeward, pensive but much pleased. I had met with unexpected notice from a person whom I believed to have been prejudiced against me. "Kind and affable to me had been his condescension, and should be honoured ever with suitable regard."
- 20 He was the first poet I had known, and he certainly answered to that inspired name. I had heard a great deal of his powers of conversation, and was not disappointed. In fact, I never met with anything at all like them, either before or since. I could easily credit the accounts which were circulated of his holding forth to a large party of ladies and gentlemen, an evening or two before, on the Berkeleian Theory, when he made the whole material universe look like a transparency of fine words; and another
- 30 story (which I believe he has somewhere told himself) of his being asked to a party at Birmingham, of his smoking tobacco and going to sleep after dinner on a sofa, where the company found him to their no small

surprise, which was increased to wonder when he started up of a sudden, and, rubbing his eyes, looked about him, and launched into a three-hours' description of the third heaven, of which he had had a dream, very different from Mr Southey's 'Vision of Judgment,' and also from that other 'Vision of Judgment,' which Mr Murray, the Secretary of the Bridge Street Junta, took into his especial keeping!

On my way back I had a sound in my ears—it was the voice of Fancy; I had a light before me—it was 10 the face of Poetry. The one still lingers there, the other has not quitted my side! Coleridge, in truth, met me half-way on the ground of philosophy, or I should not have been won over to his imaginative creed. I had an uneasy, pleasurable sensation all the time till I was to visit him. During those months the chill breath of winter gave me a welcoming; the vernal air was balm and inspiration to me. The golden sunsets, the silver star of evening, lighted me on my way to new hopes and prospects. *I was to visit* 20 *Coleridge in the spring.* This circumstance was never absent from my thoughts and mingled with all my feelings. I wrote to him at the time proposed, and received an answer postponing my intended visit for a week or two, but very cordially urging me to complete my promise then. This delay did not damp, but rather increased, my ardour. In the meantime I went to Llangollen Vale, by way of initiating myself in the mysteries of natural scenery; and I must say I was enchanted with it. I had been reading Coleridge's 30 description of England in his fine 'Ode on the Departing Year,' and I applied it, *con amore*, to the objects before me. That valley was to me (in a manner) the

cradle of a new existence : in the river that winds through it, my spirit was baptised in the waters of Helicon !

I returned home, and soon after set out on my journey with unworn heart and untired feet. My way lay through Worcester and Gloucester and by Upton, where I thought of Tom Jones and the adventure of the muff. I remember getting completely wet through one day, and stopping at an inn (I think it was at
10 Tewkesbury), where I sat up all night to read 'Paul and Virginia.' Sweet were the showers in early youth that drenched my body, and sweet the drops of pity that fell upon the books I read ! I recollect a remark of Coleridge's upon this very book,—that nothing could show the gross indelicacy of French manners and the entire corruption of their imagination more strongly than the behaviour of the heroine in the last fatal scene, who turns away from a person on board the sinking vessel that offers to save her life because
20 he has thrown off his clothes to assist him in swimming. Was this a time to think of such a circumstance ? I once hinted to Wordsworth, as we were sailing in his boat on Grasmere lake, that I thought he had borrowed the idea of his 'Poems on the Naming of Places' from the local inscriptions of the same kind in 'Paul and Virginia.' He did not own the obligation, and stated some distinction without a difference, in defence of his claim to originality. Any, the slightest, variation would be sufficient for this purpose in his mind ; for whatever
30 he added or altered would inevitably be worth all that any one else had done, and contain the marrow of the sentiment. I was still two days before the time fixed for my arrival, for I had taken care to set out early

enough. I stopped these two days at Bridgewater, and when I was tired of sauntering on the banks of its muddy river, returned to the inn and read 'Camilla.' So have I loitered my life away, reading books, looking at pictures, going to plays, hearing, thinking, writing on what pleased me best. I have wanted only one thing to make me happy, but wanting that have wanted everything!

I arrived and was well received. The country about Nether Stowey is beautiful, green and hilly, and near 10 the sea-shore. I saw it but the other day, after an interval of twenty years, from a hill near Taunton. How was the map of my life spread out before me, as the map of the country lay at my feet! In the afternoon Coleridge took me over to All-Foxden, a romantic old family mansion of the St Aubins, where Wordsworth lived. It was then in the possession of a friend of the poet's, who gave him the free use of it. Somehow that period (the time just after the French Revolution) was not a time when *nothing was given* 20 *for nothing*. The mind opened, and a softness might be perceived coming over the heart of individuals, beneath "the scales that fence" our self-interest. Wordsworth himself was from home, but his sister kept house, and set before us a frugal repast; and we had free access to her brother's poems, the 'Lyrical Ballads,' which were still in manuscript, or in the form of 'Sibylline Leaves.' I dipped into a few of these with great satisfaction, and with the faith of a novice. I slept that night in an old room 30 with blue hangings and covered with the round-faced family-portraits of the age of George I. and II., and from the wooded declivity of the adjoining park

that overlooked my window at the dawn of day
could

“Hear the loud stag speak.”

In the outset of life (and particularly at this time I felt it so) our imagination has a body to it. We are in a state between sleeping and waking, and have indistinct but glorious glimpses of strange shapes, and there is always something to come better than what we see. As in our dreams the fulness of the blood gives
10 warmth and reality to the coinage of the brain, so in youth our ideas are clothed, and fed, and pampered with our good spirits: we breathe thick with thoughtless happiness, the weight of future years presses on the strong pulses of the heart, and we repose with undisturbed faith in truth and good. As we advance, we exhaust our fund of enjoyment and of hope. We are no longer wrapped in *lamb's wool*, lulled in Elysium. As we taste the pleasures of life, their spirit evaporates, the sense palls; and nothing is left but the phantoms,
20 the lifeless shadows, of what *has been*!

That morning, as soon as breakfast was over, we strolled out into the park, and, seating ourselves on the trunk of the old ash-tree that stretched along the ground, Coleridge read aloud with a sonorous and musical voice the ballad of ‘Betty Foy.’ I was not critically or sceptically inclined. I saw touches of truth and nature, and took the rest for granted. But in the ‘Thorn,’ the ‘Mad Mother,’ and the ‘Complaint of a Poor Indian Woman,’ I felt that deeper power
30 and pathos which have been since acknowledged,

“In spite of pride, in erring reason’s spite,”

as the characteristics of this author; and the sense of

a new style and a new spirit in poetry came over me. It had to me something of the effect that arises from the turning up of the fresh soil, or of the first welcome breath of spring,

“While yet the trembling year is unconfirmed.”

Coleridge and myself walked back to Stowey that evening, and his voice sounded high

“Of Providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate,
Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,”

as we passed through echoing grove, by fairy stream or 10
waterfall, gleaming in the summer moonlight! He lamented that Wordsworth was not prone enough to believe in the traditional superstitions of the place, and that there was a something corporeal, a *matter-of-factness*, a clinging to the palpable or often to the petty, in his poetry, in consequence. His genius was not a spirit that descended to him through the air: it sprung out of the ground like a flower, or unfolded itself from a green spray on which the goldfinch sang. He said, however (if I remember right), that this objection 20
must be confined to his descriptive pieces, that his philosophic poetry had a grand and comprehensive spirit in it, so that his soul seemed to inhabit the universe like a palace, and to discover truth by intuition rather than by deduction. The next day Wordsworth arrived from Bristol at Coleridge's cottage. I think I see him now. He answered in some degree to his friend's description of him, but was more gaunt and Don Quixote-like. He was quaintly dressed (according to the *costume* of that unconstrained period) 30
in a brown fustian jacket and striped pantaloons. There was something of a roll, a lounge, in his gait,

not unlike his own 'Peter Bell.' There was a severe, worn pressure of thought about his temples, a fire in his eye (as if he saw something in objects more than the outward appearance), an intense, high, narrow forehead, a Roman nose, cheeks furrowed by strong purpose and feeling, and a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth, a good deal at variance with the solemn, stately expression of the rest of his face. Chantrey's bust wants the marking traits; but he
10 was teased into making it regular and heavy: Haydon's head of him, introduced into the Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem, is the most like his drooping weight of thought and expression. He sat down and talked very naturally and freely, with a mixture of clear gushing accents in his voice, a deep guttural intonation, and a strong tincture of the northern *burr*, like the crust on wine. He instantly began to make havoc of the half of a Cheshire cheese on the table, and said triumphantly that "his marriage with experience had
20 not been so productive as Mr Southey's in teaching him a knowledge of the good things of this life." He had been to see the 'Castle Spectre' by Monk Lewis, while at Bristol, and described it very well. He said "it fitted the taste of the audience like a glove." This *ad captandum* merit was, however, by no means a recommendation of it, according to the severe principles of the new school, which reject rather than court popular effect. Wordsworth, looking out of the low, latticed window, said, "How beautifully
30 the sun sets on that yellow bank!" I thought within myself, "With what eyes these poets see nature!" and ever after when I saw the sunset stream upon the objects facing it, conceived I had made a discovery,

or thanked Mr Wordsworth for having made one for me! We went over to All-Foxden again the day following, and Wordsworth read us the story of 'Peter Bell' in the open air; and the comment made upon it by his face and voice was very different from that of some later critics! Whatever might be thought of the poem, "his face was as a book where men might read strange matters," and he announced the fate of his hero in prophetic tones. There is a *chaunt* in the recitation both of Coleridge and Words- 10 worth which acts as a spell upon the hearer and disarms the judgment. Perhaps they have deceived themselves by making habitual use of this ambiguous accompaniment. Coleridge's manner is more full, animated, and varied; Wordsworth's more equable, sustained, and internal. The one might be termed more *dramatic*, the other more *lyrical*. Coleridge has told me that he himself liked to compose in walking over uneven ground, or breaking through the straggling branches of a copsewood; whereas 20 Wordsworth always wrote (if he could) walking up and down a straight gravel-walk, or in some spot where the continuity of his verse met with no collateral interruption. Returning that same evening, I got into a metaphysical argument with Wordsworth, while Coleridge was explaining the different notes of the nightingale to his sister, in which we neither of us succeeded in making ourselves perfectly clear and intelligible. Thus I passed three weeks at Nether Stowey and in the neighbourhood, generally devoting the after- 30 noons to a delightful chat in an arbour made of bark by the poet's friend Tom Poole, sitting under two fine elm-trees, and listening to the bees humming

round us, while we quaffed our flip. It was agreed, among other things, that we should make a jaunt down the Bristol Channel as far as Linton. We set off together on foot, Coleridge, John Chester, and I. This Chester was a native of Nether Stowey, one of those who were attracted to Coleridge's discourse as flies are to honey, or bees in swarming-time to the sound of a brass pan. He "followed in the chase, like a dog who hunts, not like one that made up the
10 cry." He had on a brown cloth coat, boots, and corduroy breeches, was low in stature, bow-legged, had a drag in his walk like a drover, which he assisted by a hazel switch, and kept on a sort of trot by the side of Coleridge like a running footman by a state-coach, that he might not lose a syllable or sound that fell from Coleridge's lips. He told me his private opinion that Coleridge was a wonderful man. He scarcely opened his lips, much less offered an opinion, the whole way: yet of the three, had I to choose during
20 that journey, I would be John Chester. He afterwards followed Coleridge into Germany, where the Kantian philosophers were puzzled how to bring him under any of their categories. When he sat down at table with his idol, John's felicity was complete: Sir Walter Scott's, or Mr Blackwood's, when they sat down at the same table with the King, was not more so. We passed Dunster on our right, a small town between the brow of a hill and the sea. I remember eyeing it wistfully as it lay below us: contrasted with the woody
30 scene around, it looked as clear, as pure, as *embrowned* and ideal, as any landscape I have seen since of Gaspar Poussin's or Domenichino's. We had a long day's march—our feet kept time to the echoes of Coleridge's

tongue—through Minehead and by the Blue Anchor, and on to Linton, which we did not reach till near midnight, and where we had some difficulty in making a lodgment. We, however, knocked the people of the house up at last, and we were repaid for our apprehensions and fatigue by some excellent rashers of fried bacon and eggs. The view in coming along had been splendid. We walked for miles and miles on dark brown heaths overlooking the Channel with the Welsh hills beyond, and at times descended into little 10 sheltered valleys close by the sea-side, with a smuggler's face scowling by us, and then had to ascend conical hills with a path winding up through a coppice to a barren top like a monk's shaven crown, from one of which I pointed out to Coleridge's notice the bare masts of a vessel on the very edge of the horizon and within the red-orbed disk of the setting sun like his own spectre-ship in the 'Ancient Mariner.' At Linton the character of the sea-coast becomes more marked and rugged. There is a place 20 called the Valley of the Rocks (I suspect this was only the poetical name for it) bedded among precipices overhanging the sea, with rocky caverns beneath into which the waves dash, and where the sea-gull for ever wheels its screaming flight. On the tops of these are huge stones thrown transverse, as if an earthquake had tossed them there, and behind these is a fretwork of perpendicular rocks something like the Giants' Causeway. A thunderstorm came on while we were at the inn, and Coleridge was running out bareheaded to enjoy 30 the commotion of the elements in the Valley of Rocks; but, as if in spite, the clouds only muttered a few angry sounds and let fall a few refreshing drops. Coleridge

- told me that he and Wordsworth were to have made this place the scene of a prose tale, which was to have been in the manner of, but far superior to, the 'Death of Abel,' but they had relinquished the design. In the morning of the second day we breakfasted luxuriously in an old-fashioned parlour on tea, toast, eggs, and honey, in the very sight of the beehives from which it had been taken and a garden full of thyme and wild-flowers that had produced it. On this occasion
- 10 Coleridge spoke of Virgil's 'Georgics,' but not well. I do not think he had much feeling for the classical or elegant. It was in this room that we found a little worn-out copy of the 'Seasons' lying in a window-seat, on which Coleridge exclaimed, "*That* is true fame!" He said Thomson was a great poet, rather than a good one; his style was as meretricious as his thoughts were natural. He spoke of Cowper as the best modern poet. He said the 'Lyrical Ballads' were
- 20 worth to see how far the public taste would endure poetry written in a more natural and simple style than had hitherto been attempted, totally discarding the artifices of poetical diction, and making use only of such words as had probably been common in the most ordinary language since the days of Henry II. Some comparison was introduced between Shakespeare and Milton. He said "he hardly knew which to prefer. Shakespeare seemed to him a mere stripling in the art; he was as tall and as strong, with infinitely more
- 30 activity than Milton, but he never appeared to have come to man's estate; or if he had, he would not have been a man, but a monster." He spoke with contempt of Gray, and with intolerance of Pope. He

did not like the versification of the latter. He observed that "the ears of these couplet-writers might be charged with having short memories that could not retain the harmony of whole passages." He thought little of Junius as a writer; he had a dislike of Dr Johnson; and a much higher opinion of Burke as an orator and politician than of Fox or Pitt. He, however, thought him very inferior in richness of style and imagery to some of our elder prose writers, particularly Jeremy Taylor. He liked Richardson, but not Field- 10
ing; nor could I get him to enter into the merits of 'Caleb Williams.'¹ In short, he was profound and discriminating with respect to those authors whom he liked, and where he gave his judgment fair play; capricious, perverse, and prejudiced in his antipathies and distastes. We loitered on the "ribbed sea-sand" in such talk as this a whole morning, and, I recollect, met with a curious sea-weed, of which John Chester told us the country name! A fisherman gave Cole-
ridge an account of a boy that had been drowned the 20
day before, and that they had tried to save him at the risk of their own lives. He said "he did not know how it was that they ventured, but, sir, we have a *nature* towards one another." This expression, Cole-ridge remarked to me, was a fine illustration of that theory of disinterestedness which I (in common with

¹ He had no idea of pictures, of Claude or Raphael, and at this time I had as little as he. He sometimes gives a striking account at present of the cartoons at Pisa, by Buffamalco and others; of one in particular, where Death is seen in the air brandishing his scythe, and the great and mighty of the earth shudder at his approach, while the beggars and the wretched kneel to him as their deliverer. He would of course understand so broad and fine a moral as this at any time.

Butler) had adopted. I broached to him an argument of mine to prove that *likeness* was not mere association of ideas. I said that the mark in the sand put one in mind of a man's foot, not because it was part of a former impression of a man's foot (for it was quite new), but because it was like the shape of a man's foot. He assented to the justness of this distinction (which I have explained at length elsewhere for the benefit of the curious), and John Chester listened,
10 not from any interest in the subject, but because he was astonished that I should be able to suggest anything to Coleridge that he did not already know. We returned on the third morning, and Coleridge remarked the silent cottage-smoke curling up the valleys where, a few evenings before, we had seen the lights gleaming through the dark.

In a day or two after we arrived at Stowey we set out, I on my return home, and he for Germany. It was a Sunday morning, and he was to preach that day
20 for Dr Toulmin of Taunton. I asked him if he had prepared anything for the occasion. He said he had not even thought of the text, but should as soon as we parted. I did not go to hear him,—this was a fault,—but we met in the evening at Bridgewater. The next day we had a long day's walk to Bristol, and sat down, I recollect, by a well-side on the road, to cool ourselves and satisfy our thirst, when Coleridge repeated to me some descriptive lines from his tragedy of 'Remorse,' which I must say became his mouth
30 and that occasion better than they, some years after, did Mr Elliston's and the Drury Lane boards.

"O memory! shield me from the world's poor strife,
And give those scenes thine everlasting life."

I saw no more of him for a year or two, during which period he had been wandering in the Hartz Forest in Germany; and his return was cometary, meteorous, unlike his setting out. It was not till some time after that I knew his friends Lamb and Southey. The last always appears to me (as I first saw him) with a commonplace book under his arm, and the first with a *bon-mot* in his mouth. It was at Godwin's that I met him with Holcroft and Coleridge, where they were disputing fiercely which was the best—*Man as he was,* 10
or man as he is to be. "Give me," says Lamb, "man as he is *not* to be." This saying was the beginning of a friendship between us, which I believe still continues. Enough of this for the present.

"But there is matter for another rhyme,
 And I to this may add a second tale."

NOTES.

I. ON CRITICISM.

THIS essay appeared in 1822 in the second volume of 'Table-Talk, or Original Essays.' "The title," says Hazlitt, "may perhaps serve to explain what there is of peculiarity in the style or mode of treating the subjects. I had remarked that when I had written or thought upon a particular topic, and afterwards had occasion to speak of it with a friend, the conversation generally took a much wider range, and branched off into a number of indirect and collateral questions, which were not strictly connected with the original view of the subject, but which often threw a curious and striking light upon it, or upon human life in general. It therefore occurred to me as possible to combine the advantages of these two styles, the *literary* and *conversational*; or, after stating and enforcing some leading idea, to follow it up by such observations and reflections as would probably suggest themselves in discussing the same question in company with others. This seemed to me to promise a greater variety and richness, and perhaps a greater sincerity, than could be attained by a more precise and scholastic method."

2. 28. "As when a well-graced actor," &c. 'Richard II.,' V ii. 23-25—

"As in a theatre, the eyes of men,
After a well-graced actor leaves the stage,
Are idly bent on him that enters next."

3. 16. Peter Pounce . . . Parson Adams. See Fielding's 'Joseph Andrews,' Bk. III. ch. 13.

3. 26. "assumes the rod," &c. Dryden's 'Alexander's Feast,'
ll. 39-41. The correct reading is—

"Assumes the god,
Affects to nod,
And seems to shake the spheres."

4. 14. the most admired of our Reviews, the 'Edinburgh Review,' founded in 1802 by Francis Jeffrey, Sydney Smith, Brougham, and others. Hazlitt sings its praises in the account of Jeffrey in the 'Spirit of the Age' (1825). "The principles" of the 'Edinburgh Review,' he says, "were by no means decidedly hostile to existing institutions: but the spirit was that of fair and free discussion; a field was open to argument and wit; every question was tried upon its own ostensible merits, and there was no foul play. . . . It takes up a question and argues it *pro* and *con* with great knowledge and boldness and skill; it points out an absurdity, and runs it down fairly and according to the evidence adduced." In these respects Hazlitt held it to be in direct opposition to the Tory 'Quarterly Review,' which was founded in 1808, with William Gifford (see below) as its first editor. In the 'Plain Speaker' (1826) Hazlitt refers to the 'Edinburgh Review' as "that Ulysses' bow of critics and politicians," and says that "to be an *Edinburgh Reviewer* is, I suspect, the highest rank in modern literary society." Hazlitt first contributed to it in 1814, and wrote for it altogether nineteen articles.

4. 27. the 'Monthly Review' was founded in May 1749 by Ralph Griffiths (1720-1803). Goldsmith was for a while one of its chief contributors.

"sole sovereign sway," &c. See 'Macbeth,' I. v. 71.

5. 1. "outdoing Termagant," &c. See 'Hamlet,' III. ii. 15.

5. 4. "and of their port," &c. Chaucer, 'Prologue,' l. 69.

5. 5. that Drawcansir work. Drawcansir is a blustering bully in the 'Rehearsal' (1671), a burlesque by the second Duke of Buckingham and others of Dryden's heroic plays. In his last speech Drawcansir says:—

"Others may boast a single man to kill,
But I the blood of thousands daily spill.
Let petty kings the names of Parties know:
Where'er I come, I slay both friend and foe."

5. 8. Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759, &c) was condemned

by Johnson, Richardson, Goldsmith, and Horace Walpole, as well as by Smollett in the 'Critical Review' and by Griffiths in the 'Monthly.'

5. *Note.* the Rev. Dr Kippis, Andrew Kippis, D.D. (1725-1795), a nonconformist divine, and editor of the second edition of the 'Biographica Britannica.' He contributed also to the 'Gentleman's Magazine,' the 'Monthly Review,' and the 'New Annual Register,' and wrote several biographies and theological treatises.

6. 25. **Dryden's Prefaces.** Hazlitt omits to take into consideration that Dryden's criticism is in the main theoretical. It deals not so much with particular works or authors in themselves as with the principles on which works are, or should be, written. Its purpose is less interpretative or appreciative than didactic. Fortunately Hazlitt recognises the supreme excellence of parts of Dryden's criticism, but the "splendid exceptions" are more numerous than he seems to allow. Dryden was certainly influenced by the example of the French critics, but it is by no means the case that his criticisms were "written on the model of the French school." In so far as Hazlitt refers to those criticisms which were so written, or to the criticisms of the French school itself, no exception can be taken.

For the comparison between Ovid and Virgil, see the 'Dedication of the *Æneis*' (1697). The character of Shakespeare, which occurs in the 'Essay of Dramatic Poesy' (1668), is given by Hazlitt as a footnote to his account of Dryden. See pp. 148, 149.

7. 31. Cf. Hazlitt's remark on La Harpe, an ultra-classical French critic of the end of the eighteenth century, in the essay "On Old English Writers and Speakers" in the 'Plain Speaker': "Eighteen full-sized volumes of La Harpe's criticism . . . teaching the very *garçons perruquiers* how to measure the length of each act of each play by a stop-watch, and to ascertain whether the angles at the four corners of each classic volume are right ones."

8. 6. In 1674 Dryden published 'The State of Innocence, or the Fall of Man,' an operatic adaptation of 'Paradise Lost.' It was never acted. Dryden was not blind to the merits of 'Paradise Lost.' In the preface to his adaptation he calls it "undoubtedly one of the greatest, most noble, and most sublime poems which either this age or nation has produced."

He is stated to have said of Milton, "This man cuts us all out and the ancients too."

8. 21. "**graces snatched**," &c. See Pope, 'Essay on Criticism,' l. 153.

9. 21. **Titian**, or Tiziano Vecelli (1477-1576), the greatest painter of the Venetian school.

9. 22. **Guido Reni** (1575-1642), a painter of the school of Bologna. See Hazlitt's essay "On a Portrait by Vandyke" in the 'Plain Speaker.'

9. 23. "**looks commercing with the skies**." Milton, 'Il Penseroso,' l. 39.

10. 11. **Murillo**, Bartolomé Estéban (1617-1682), a native of Seville. He and his friend and fellow-townsmen Velasquez (1599-1660) are the two greatest painters of the Spanish school.

10. 22. **Lord Byron asserts**, in his 'Letter on the Rev. W. L. Bowles's Strictures on Pope' (1821): "To the question, 'Whether the description of a game of cards be as poetical, supposing the execution of the artists equal, as a description of a walk in a forest?' it may be answered that the *materials* are certainly not equal, but that 'the *artist*' who has rendered the 'game of cards poetical' is by far the greater of the two. But all this 'ordering' of poets is purely arbitrary on the part of Mr Bowles. There may or may not be, in fact, different 'orders' of poetry, but the poet is always ranked according to his execution, and not according to his branch of the art." Hazlitt discusses these views in an essay on 'Pope, Lord Byron, and Mr Bowles,' now given in the appendix to the 'Lectures on the English Poets.'

10. 29. **Raphael** or Raffaello Sanzio (1483-1520), generally recognised as the greatest of painters. A comparison of him with Michael Angelo is the subject of the essay entitled "The Vatican" in Hazlitt's 'Criticisms on Art.'

11. 11. **Mrs Dickons**, Maria Dickons, *née* Poole (1770?-1833).

11. 12. **Miss Stephens**, Catherine Stephens (1794-1882), married in 1838 to the fifth Earl of Essex.

11. 19. **Madame Catalani**, Angelica (1779-1849).

11. 27. "**such sweet thunder**." 'Midsummer-Night's Dream,' IV. i. 122.

12. 1. "**milk of human kindness**." 'Macbeth,' I. v. 18.

12. 9. In the following passage Hazlitt refers to the 'Quarterly Review' and 'Blackwood's Magazine,' and in particular to the former. In the account of Gifford in the 'Spirit of the Age,'

Hazlitt calls the 'Quarterly' "a depository for every species of political sophistry and personal calumny. . . . There we meet the slime of hypocrisy, the varnish of courts, the cant of pedantry, the cobwebs of the law, the iron hand of power. . . . The intention is to poison the sources of public opinion and of individual fame. . . . The editor and his friends systematically explode every principle of liberty, laugh patriotism and public spirit to scorn, resent every pretence to integrity as a piece of singularity or insolence, and strike at the root of all free inquiry or discussion by running down every writer as a vile scribbler and a bad member of society who is not a hireling and a slave."

12. 21. Justice Woodcock, a gouty, crusty old gentleman in 'Love in a Village' (1762), a comic opera by Isaac Bickerstaffe (c. 1735-1812).

12. 22. the Della Cruscan School arose towards the end of the eighteenth century from the literary dabbings of a society of English residents in Florence who "took a fancy to while away their time in scribbling high-flown panegyrics on themselves." A collection of these was published in 1785, under the title of the 'Florence Miscellany.' Others soon began to be printed in England in a paper called the 'World,' and later in the 'Oracle,' and, being much admired, were widely imitated. "The fever turned to a frenzy: Laura Maria, Carlos, Orlando, Reuben, Miranda, Leonardo, Adelaide, and a thousand other nameless names, caught the infection, and from one end of the kingdom to the other all was nonsense and Della Crusca." Gifford determined "to correct the growing depravity of the public taste, and check the inundation of absurdity that was bursting upon us from a thousand springs." He accordingly produced in 1794 the 'Baviad,' a satire in heroic couplets in the manner of Pope. The effect was telling; but the school was not extirpated till, in 1795, Gifford returned to the attack in the 'Mæviad' (from the preface to which the above quotations are taken). Among its chief exponents were Robert Merry (1755-1798), who signed himself Della Crusca, and whose pseudonym gave the name to the school; Mrs Hannah Cowley (1743-1809), authoress of several dramas, who assumed the name of Anna Matilda; Mrs Robinson (Laura Maria); and Bertie Greathed (1759-1826), known as Reuben. Mrs Piozzi (1741-1821), the friend of Dr Johnson, was likewise connected with the school; she edited

in 1784 the 'Arno Miscellany,' the predecessor of the 'Florence Miscellany.' The name Della Crusca was taken from the title of the Academy founded in Florence in 1582 to preserve and purify the Italian language.

In the account of Gifford in the 'Spirit of the Age,' Hazlitt says, "His attacks on Mrs Robinson were unmanly, and even those on Mr Merry and the Della Cruscan school were much more ferocious than the occasion warranted. A little affectation and quaintness of style did not merit such severity of castigation." He gives specimens of Gifford's own verse, including 'Verses to Anna.' In Hazlitt's estimation they were not superior to the verses which "the fastidious author of the 'Baviad' and 'Mæviad'" satirised. See also Hazlitt's allusion to the Della Cruscan school in the essay "On Effeminacy of Character" in 'Table-Talk.'

12. 29. Rodilardus, the huge cat which scared Panurge, the clever but timid rogue in Rabelais' 'Gargantua and Pantagruel,' iv. 67.

13. 6, and note. Hanover rats. See Fielding's 'Tom Jones,' Bk. vi. ch. 14: "Pox! the world is come to a fine pass indeed. if we are all fools, except a parcel of round-heads and Hanover rats. Pox! I hope the times are a-coming that we shall make fools of them, and every man shall enjoy his own. . . . I hope to see it, sister, before the Hanover rats have eat up all our corn, and left us nothing but turnips to feed upon" (Squire Western *loquitur*).

14. 12. Hazlitt's reference is not clear, and the vagueness of the reference is unfortunately aggravated by slipshod expression. Scott had openly questioned the prudence of publishing the Chaldee Manuscript—the famous *jeu d'esprit* which appeared in the first number of 'Blackwood's Magazine' (October 1817)—and it seems likely that Hazlitt and other London victims of Lockhart's satire were only too eager to magnify the report of Scott's displeasure. At any rate, it is certain that the Chaldee MS. was followed by many scathing denunciations of the Cockney School: the "masked battery" was not silenced until a later date, when the practice of literary criticism had become more urbane.

14. 16. "pilloried on infamy's high stage." Cowper, 'Hope,' l. 556.

14. 26. the English . . . are rather a foul-mouthed nation. Cf. Hazlitt's "Madame Pasta and Mademoiselle Mars" in the

'Plain Speaker': "They [the French] split on this rock of complaisance, surrendering every principle to the fear of giving offence, as we do on the opposite one of party-spirit and rancorous hostility, sacrificing the best of causes and our best friends to the desire of giving offence, to the indulgence of our spleen, and of an ill-tongue. We apply a degrading appellation or bring an opprobrious charge against an individual; and such is our tenaciousness of the painful and disagreeable, so fond are we of brooding over grievances, so incapable are our imaginations of raising themselves above the lowest scurrility or the dirtiest abuse, that should the person attacked come out an angel from the contest, the prejudice against him remains nearly the same as if the charge had been fully proved. . . . John Bull would as soon give up an estate as a bugbear." Hazlitt is smarting under the bitterness of his own experience.

15. 21. **Rogers**, Samuel (1763-1855), author of the 'Pleasures of Memory' (1792), &c.

16. 15. **the controversy about Pope**. This question is treated at greater length in the ensuing account of Pope, p. 130 *et seq.*

17. 19. "**crib and cabin in.**" 'Macbeth,' III. iv. 24: "cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in."

17. 29. "**lack-lustre eye.**" 'As You Like It,' II. vii. 21.

18. 9. **Joseph Fawcett** (c. 1758-1804), dissenting minister and poet. He retired from the ministry about 1795, and took up residence at Hedgegrove, in Hertfordshire, and it was here that Hazlitt first became acquainted with him. It was at one time said that Hazlitt intended to write his life, but the scheme was not carried out. (See the 'Memoirs of William Hazlitt,' 1867, vol. i. p. 79.)

18. 22. "**I have oft heard my mother Circe,**" &c. 'Comus,' ll. 252, 253.

18. 25. Hazlitt probably refers to Wordsworth and Coleridge. See 'My First Acquaintance with Poets,' p. 201.

19. 8. **Gil Blas**, by Alain René Lesage (1668-1747), published 1715-1735.

19. 9. **Don Quixote**, by Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616), published 1605-1615.

19. 26. See 1 Corinthians xiii.

20. 3. Hazlitt had undoubtedly Coleridge in his mind's eye in describing the "Occult School" of critics, as may be shown

by the following extract from the essay "On the Conversation of Authors" in the 'Plain Speaker,' some of the phrases even being identical: "Coleridge withholds his tribute of applause from every person in whom any mortal but himself can descry the least glimpse of understanding. He would be thought to look farther into a millstone than anybody else. He would have others see with his eyes, and take their opinions from him on trust, in spite of their senses. The more obscure and defective the indications of merit, the greater his sagacity and candour in being the first to point them out. He looks upon what he nicknames *a man of genius* but as the breath of his nostrils and the clay in the potter's hands. If any such inert, unconscious mass, under the fostering care of the modern Prometheus, is kindled into life,—begins to see, speak, and move, so as to attract the notice of other people,—our jealous patroniser of latent worth in that case throws aside, scorns, and hates his own handiwork, and deserts his intellectual offspring from the moment they can go along and shift for themselves." Cf. p. 193, ll. 4, 5. In the essay on "Patronage and Puffing" in 'Table-Talk,' Hazlitt tells a story about Coleridge which illustrates this characteristic, adding, "The truth is, we like to have something to admire ourselves, as well as to make other people gape and stare at; but then it must be a discovery of our own, an idol of our own making and setting up." In one of the lectures on the 'Age of Elizabeth' he gives a long quotation from Coleridge on Sir Thomas Browne, beginning, "Sir Thomas Browne is among my first favourites."

21. 4. "**An ounce of sour,**" &c. Cf. "One ounce of mirth is worth a pound of sorrow" in Henry Carey's 'Chrononhotontologos' (1734), last scene. The phrase is said to occur also in Baxter's 'Self-denial.'

21. 5. **caviare.** Cf. "caviare to the general," 'Hamlet,' II. ii. 457.

21. *note.* **Ultra-Crepidarian critics.** The epithet—formed from the Latin proverb *ne sutor ultra crepidam*, "let the cobbler stick to his last"—is directed against William Gifford, editor of the 'Quarterly Review,' who in his youth had been apprenticed to a bootmaker. "You have been well called an Ultra-Crepidarian critic," says Hazlitt in his 'Letter to William Gifford, Esq.' (1819). In 1823, a year after the publication of this essay, Leigh Hunt brought out 'Ultra-Crepidarius: a Satire [*in verse*] on William Gifford.' "The title of 'Ultra-

Crepidarius,'" says Hunt in the preface, "which was invented for him by a friend of mine, came out of one of the humblest as well as noblest spirits that exist." As it is improbable that Hunt here refers to Hazlitt, it would seem that both were indebted to a common source. This may have been Charles Lamb. He never forgave Gifford for editing freely a review of Wordsworth's 'Excursion' which he had contributed to the 'Quarterly.' In a letter to Wordsworth he says the review "in the 'Quarterly' is a spurious one, which Mr Baviad Gifford has palmed upon it for mine. . . . The language he has altered throughout. . . . But that would have been little, putting his damn'd shoemaker phraseology (for he was a shoemaker) instead of mine, which has been tinged with better authors than his ignorance can comprehend," &c. ; and he wrote a sonnet entitled 'Saint Crispin to Mr Gifford,' which ends—

"And better to this hour you had been plying
The obsequious awl, with well-wax'd finger flying,
Than ceaseless thus to till a thankless vein :
Still teasing muses which are still denying,
Making a stretching-leather of your brain."

Hunt's allusion to "one of the humblest as well as noblest spirits that exist" gives colour to the conjecture that the author of the epithet was Lamb. Perhaps Lamb stammered it out at one of his Wednesday evening parties. "He always made the best pun, and the best remark in the course of the evening," says Hazlitt.

II. ON POETRY IN GENERAL.

This was the first of a series of eight lectures on 'The English Poets,' delivered at the Surrey Institution in 1818 and published the same year.

23. 6. "spreads its sweet leaves," &c. 'Romeo and Juliet,' I. i. 158, 159.

23. 19. "the stuff of which our life is made." Cf. 'Tempest,' IV. i. 156, 157.

23. 20. "mere oblivion." 'As You Like It,' II. vii. 165.

23. 26. "man's life is poor as beast's." Cf. 'King Lear,' II. iv. 270 : "Man's life's as cheap as beast's."

23. 29. **The Bourgeois Gentilhomme**, the chief character in Molière's "comédie-ballet" of the same name, produced 1670.

24. 15. "such seething brains," &c. 'Midsummer-Night's Dream,' V. i. 4-18.

24. 33. **Angelica and Medoro**. In 'Orlando Furioso' (1516).

25. 19. "ecstasy is very cunning in." 'Hamlet,' III. iv. 138, 139.

26. 15. **Bacon**, 'Advancement of Learning,' Bk. ii.: "It appeareth that poesy serveth and conferreth to magnanimity, morality, and delectation. And therefore it was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind; whereas reason doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things."

26. 33. "Our eyes are made the fools." 'Macbeth,' II. i. 44.

27. 3. "That if it would but apprehend some joy," &c. 'Midsummer-Night's Dream,' V. i. 19-22.

27. 8. "The flame o' the taper," &c. 'Cymbeline,' II. ii. 19-21.

27. 29. "for they are old like him." See 'King Lear,' II. iv. 192-195—

"O heavens,

If you do love old men, if your sweet sway

Allow obedience, if yourselves are old,

Make it your cause; send down, and take my part."

28. 22. "Nothing but his unkind daughters," &c. 'King Lear,' III. iv. 72, 73—

"Nothing could have subdued nature

To such a lowness but his unkind daughters."

28. 29. "The little dogs and all." 'King Lear,' III. vi. 65, 66. There is a corresponding passage, with the three same references to 'King Lear,' in Hazlitt's "Scott, Racine, and Shakespeare" in the 'Plain Speaker.'

29. 5. "So I am." 'King Lear,' IV. vii. 70.

29. 12. "Oh, now, for ever," &c. 'Othello,' III. iii. 347-357.

29. 27. "Never, Iago," &c. 'Othello,' III. iii. 453-460.

30. 3. "But there, where I have garner'd up my heart," &c. 'Othello,' IV. ii. 57 and 60.

30. 32. **Moore**, Edward (1712-1757), author of the 'Gamester' (1753), one of the best tragedies of the eighteenth century.

30. 32. **Lillo**, George (1693-1739), author of 'George Barnwell' (1731), an early specimen of melodrama.

31. 12. **As Mr Burke observes**—in the 'Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,' Part I. section 15: "Choose a day on which to represent the most sublime and affecting tragedy we have; appoint the most favourite actors; spare no cost upon the scenes and decorations; unite the greatest efforts of poetry, painting, and music; and when you have collected your audience, just at the moment when their minds are erect with expectation, let it be reported that a state criminal of high rank is on the point of being executed in the adjoining square; in a moment the emptiness of the theatre would demonstrate the comparative weakness of the imitative arts, and proclaim the triumph of the real sympathy."

32. 8. **"Masterless passion,"** &c. 'Merchant of Venice,' IV. i. 51, 52—

"For affection,
Mistress of passion, sways it to the mood
Of what it likes or loathes."

32. 31. **"Now night descending,"** &c. Pope, 'Dunciad,' i. 89, 90. In the 'Lectures on the English Comic Writers,' Hazlitt calls this couplet "the finest piece of wit I know of. . . . This is certainly as mortifying an inversion of the idea of poetic immortality as could be thought of." Cf. p. 141 of the present volume.

33. 3. **"Throw him,"** &c. Collins, 'Ode to Fear,' ll. 14, 15.

33. 6. **"Ingratitude,"** &c. 'King Lear,' I. iv. 281-283.

33. 28. **"to hold the mirror up to nature."** 'Hamlet,' III. ii. 24.

35. 28. **squares of the distances**, an allusion to astronomical calculations.

Chalmers, Thomas (1780-1847), the chief founder of the Free Church of Scotland in 1843, published 'Astronomical Discourses' in 1817. Hazlitt refers to them more particularly in the account of the Rev. Mr Irving in the 'Spirit of the Age,' and in the essay "On Pulpit Oratory" contributed to the 'Liberal' in 1823.

35. 29. **Rembrandt** (1607-1669), the chief painter of the Dutch school.

36. 8. **"our fell of hair,"** &c. 'Macbeth,' V. v. 11-13.

36. 16. the 'Beggars' Opera' (1727), by John Gay (1688-1732).

37. 12. "Between the acting," &c. 'Julius Cæsar,' II. i. 63-69.

37. 23. Claude Lorraine (1600-1682), properly named Claude Gellée. He was a native of Lorraine, but lived mostly in Italy. Hazlitt considered him the finest landscape painter in the world, "that ever had been, or would ever be." See the essay on "Whether Genius is Conscious of its Powers" in the 'Plain Speaker.' For Titian and Raphael see *supra*.

38. 22. "Thoughts that voluntary move," &c. 'Paradise Lost,' iii. 37, 38.

38. 28. "the words of Mercury," &c. 'Love's Labour's Lost,' V. ii. 940: "The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo."

39. 1. "So from the ground," &c. 'Faery Queen,' i. vi. 13, 14.

39. 28. "the secret soul of harmony" See 'L'Allegro,' l. 144: "secret" should be "hidden." The line is quoted correctly on p. 120.

40. 20. "the golden cadences of poetry." 'Love's Labour's Lost,' IV. ii. 126.

40. 25, 26. "Sailing with supreme dominion," &c. Gray, 'Progress of Poesy,' ll. 116, 117.

41. 6. "sounding always the increase of his winning." 'Prologue to the Canterbury Tales,' l. 275.

41. 7. Cf. Hazlitt's essay "On the Prose Style of Poets" in the 'Plain Speaker.' "What is a little extraordinary," he says, "there is a want of *rhythmus* and cadence in what they write without the help of metrical rules. Like persons who have been accustomed to sing to music, they are at a loss in the absence of the habitual accompaniment and guide to their judgment. Their style halts, totters, is loose, disjointed, and without expressive pauses or rapid movements. . . . Poets either get into this incoherent, undetermined, shuffling style, made up of 'unpleasing flats and sharps,' of unaccountable starts and pauses, of doubtful odds and ends, flirted about like straws in a gust of wind; or, to avoid it and steady themselves, mount into a sustained and measured prose, . . . which is more odious still, and as bad as being at sea in a calm." Hazlitt's opinion was directly opposed to Coleridge's. In the passage "On Style" in the Lectures of 1818 Coleridge

says: "It is indeed worthy of remark that all our great poets have been good prose writers, Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton; and this probably arose from their just sense of metre. For a true poet will never confound verse and prose; whereas it is almost characteristic of indifferent prose writers that they should be constantly slipping into scraps of metre" ('Miscellanies, Æsthetic and Literary,' edited by T. Ashe, 1885, p. 181).

41. 31. **Addison's 'Campaign'** (1705), written to celebrate Marlborough's victory at Blenheim. It was termed a 'Gazette in Rhyme' by Dr Joseph Warton (1722-1800), author of 'An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope' (1756; 2nd vol., 1782), and elder brother of Thomas Warton, the author of the 'History of English Poetry.' The remark occurs in the 'Essay on Pope' (vol. i. p. 30, third edition); it is referred to in Johnson's 'Life of Addison.'

42. 11. **Chaucer.** "To Boccaccio's 'Teseide' and 'Filostrato' Chaucer was indebted for something more than the groundwork of two of his most important poems (the 'Parlement of Foules' and 'Troilus and Cressida'); and he was also acquainted with three of his works in Latin prose. If, as is somewhat hardily maintained, he also knew the 'Decamerone,' and took from it, in however improved a fashion, the idea of his Canterbury Pilgrimage and the plots of any or all of the four tales (besides that of Griselde) to which resemblances have been traced in his own work, his obligations to Boccaccio become immense. Yet he never mentions his name, and it has been contended that he was himself unaware of the authorship of the poems and treatises to which he was so greatly indebted."—Mr A. W. Pollard's 'Chaucer,' p. 35.

Dryden translated from Boccaccio the tales of 'Sigismonda and Guiscardo,' 'Theodore and Honoria,' and 'Cymon and Iphigenia,' published in 1700. Cf. p. 149.

42. 17. "married to immortal verse." 'L'Allegro,' l. 137.

43. 3. the most beautiful of all the Greek tragedies—i.e., the 'Philoctetes' of Sophocles.

44. 7. "give an echo," &c. 'Twelfth Night,' II. iv. 21, 22.

44. 28. "Our poesy," &c. 'Timon of Athens,' I. i. 21-25.

49. 15. **Pope Anastasius**, in the sixth circle of the Inferno (xi. 8).

49. 22. **Count Ugolino** appears in the ninth circle of the Inferno (xxxiii). He is represented as gnawing at the head

of Archbishop Ruggieri of Pisa, at whose instigation he and his children had been starved to death in 1288. Lamb likewise condemns Reynolds's 'Ugolino' in an article (1813) on the Reynolds Gallery.

49. 22. **Michael Angelo** (1474-1563). See note on 10. 29.

49. 27. **Ossian**. The investigations made by the Highland Society in 1805 as to the authenticity of Macpherson's 'Ossian' (1762, 1763) tend to confirm Hazlitt's view that it was not "modern in the groundwork," though they likewise justified the prevailing scepticism as to the faithfulness of Macpherson's rendering. The finding was that Macpherson had given some authentic ballads, but that he had edited them very liberally and added much of his own. Wordsworth, on the other hand, held that Macpherson's 'Ossian' was essentially a modern fabrication. "From my very childhood," he writes in one of his prose prefaces, "I have felt the falsehood that pervades the volumes imposed upon the world under the name of Ossian. From what I saw with my own eyes, I knew that the imagery was spurious."

III. THE AGE OF ELIZABETH.

This was the first of a series of eight lectures on the 'Literature of the Age of Elizabeth' delivered at the Surrey Institution in 1820, and published the same year.

51. 6. **Coke**, Sir Edward (1552-1634), chief justice of the King's Bench (1613-1616). Perhaps no single lawyer has had a greater influence on English law. His chief works are his 'Law Reports' (1600-1615) and his 'Institutes' (1628, &c.) He is best known by the first part of the latter, commonly called 'Coke upon Littleton.'

52. 18. "**mere oblivion**." 'As You Like It,' II. vii. 165.

52. 20. "**poor, poor, dumb names**." Cf. 'Julius Cæsar,' iii. 2. 229.

52. 23. "**How loved**," &c. Pope, 'To the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady,' l. 71.

53. 14. "**draw the curtain**." Cf. 'Twelfth Night,' I. v. 251: "We will draw the curtain and show you the picture."

54. 7. "**the sacred influence of light**." 'Paradise Lost,' ii. 1034, 1035.

54. 8. "**Chaos and old night.**" 'Paradise Lost,' ii. 970:
"Chaos and ancient Night."

55. 16. "**nor can we think what thoughts,**" &c. Dryden,
'The Hind and the Panther,' i. 315.

55. 27. "**Think . . . there's livers out of Britain.**" 'Cymbeline,' III. iv. 142, 143.

56. 12. **red and white,** &c. 'Twelfth Night,' I. v. 257, 258—

"'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white
Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on."

56. 15. "**Pan, knit with the Graces,**" &c. 'Paradise Lost,'
iv. 266-268.

56. 19. "**there are more things,**" &c. 'Hamlet,' I. v. 166,
167. The correct reading is—

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

57. 18. "**matchless, divine, what we will.** Cf. Pope, 'Epistle
to Augustus,' ll. 69, 70—

"Shakespeare, whom you and every play-house bill
Style the divine, the matchless, what you will," &c.

59. 28. "**less than smallest dwarfs.**" 'Paradise Lost,' i. 779.

59. 31. "**desiring this man's art,**" &c. 'Sonnets,' xxix. 7.

60. 4. "**in shape and gesture proudly eminent.**" 'Paradise
Lost,' i. 590.

60. 18. "**his soul was like a star,**" &c. Wordsworth,
'London, 1802,' l. 9.

60. 21. "**drew after him,**" &c. 'Paradise Lost,' ii. 692.

60. 31. '**Venice Preserved,**' produced in 1682.

61. 14. "**Jonson's learned sock,**" a reminiscence of Milton's
'L'Allegro,' l. 132.

63. 4. The chief complete English translations of the Bible
before the authorised version of 1611 were Coverdale's Bible,
1535; Matthew's Bible, 1537; the Great Bible, often called
Cranmer's, 1539; the Geneva Bible, usually known as the
Breeches Bible, 1557; the Bishop's Bible, 1568; and the Douay
Bible, 1582-1609.

64. 33. **penetrable stuff.** 'Hamlet,' III. iv. 36.

65. 11. "**above all art, all meanness, and all pride.**" Cf.
Pope, 'Epistle to the Earl of Oxford,' l. 24—

"Above all Pain, all Passion, and all Pride."

66. 26. "to the Jews a stumbling-block," &c. 1 Cor. i. 23.

67. 9. "soft as sinews of the new-born babe." 'Hamlet,' III. iii. 71.

67. 30. "The best of men," &c. Dekker, 'The Honest Whore,' Part I. i. 12.

69. 8. The translation of Tasso's 'Gerusalemme Liberata' by Edward **Fairfax** (d. 1635) appeared in 1600 under the title of 'Godfrey of Bulloigne, or the Recoverie of Jerusalem.' A translation of a portion had already been made by Richard Carew, but Fairfax's was the first complete English translation.

69. 9. Sir John **Harrington** or Harington (1561-1612) published his translation of Ariosto's 'Orlando Furioso' in 1591. A new edition appeared in 1607.

George **Chapman** (1559?-1634), the dramatist, brought out a translation of seven books of the 'Iliad' in 1598. He completed the translation of the 'Iliad' in 1611, and of the 'Odyssey' in 1614. His 'Georgicks of Hesiod . . . translated elaborately out of the Greek' appeared in 1618.

69. 10. The chief Elizabethan translation of **Virgil** was by Thomas Phær (1510?-1560). He published 'The Seven First Books of the Eneidos' in 1558. He completed the eighth and ninth books in 1560, but died while in course of translating the tenth. All was published together posthumously in 1562, and the translation of the 'Æneid' was completed in 1584 by Thomas Twine. Richard Stanyhurst (1547-1618) brought out a translation of the first four books of the 'Æneid' in 1582. The Earl of Surrey had given a rendering of the second and fourth books of the 'Æneid' in 1537. The first complete translation of the 'Æneid' had been finished in 1513 by Gavin Douglas, Bishop of Dunkeld.

The chief translation of **Ovid** was by Arthur Golding (1536?-1605?), who published his rendering of the first four books of the 'Metamorphoses' in 1565, the complete rendering of the fifteen books appearing two years later. This remained the chief English translation till the appearance of Sandys' 'Ovid' in 1632. George Turberville (1540?-1610?) brought out a translation of the 'Heroycall Epistles' in 1567.

69. 11. Sir **Thomas North** (1535?-1601?) produced his translation of Plutarch in 1579.

69. 18. the satirist **Aretine**. Pietro Aretino (1492-1557), whose satire procured for him the title of "the Scourge of

Princes," had not found an English translation by this time ; nor, indeed, had Dante's 'Divine Comedy,' nor Boccaccio's 'Decameron,' the earliest known translation of which appeared in 1620.

69. 18. Machiavel. The only works of Machiavelli (1469-1527) translated during the reign of Elizabeth were the 'Florentine History' (translated by Thomas Bedingfield, 1595) and the 'Art of War' (translated by P. Whitehorne, 1560-62). The 'Prince' was not translated till considerably later, but it was "familiar" to our rulers as well as writers, and an English refutation of it was published.

Castiglione, Baldasarre (1478-1529), author of 'The Courtier' ('Il Cortegiano'), translated by T. Hoby, 1561. There were several reprints of the translation.

69. 20. Ronsard, Pierre de (1524-1585), the French "prince of poets" in the sixteenth century. Both Queen Elizabeth and Mary Queen of Scots sent him gifts, but no translation of his works was published in their time.

Du Bartas, Guillaume (1544-1590), author of 'La Semaine, ou la Création du Monde' (1578), and 'La Seconde Semaine' (1584). They were translated by Josuah Sylvester (1563-1618) from 1592. The first collective edition of his translations was issued in 1605-1606 under the title 'Du Bartas, his Devine Weekes and Workes.'

71. 5. "Fortunate fields and groves," &c. 'Paradise Lost,' iii. 569, 570.

71. 7. "like those Hesperian gardens famed of old." 'Paradise Lost,' iii. 568.

71. 13. The sources of the story of the 'Tempest' are still undetermined. See Mr Sidney Lee's 'Life of William Shakespeare' p. 252 *et seq.* : "The name of the god Setebos, whom Caliban worships, is drawn from Eden's translation of Magellan's 'Voyage to the South Pole' (in the 'Historie of Travell,' 1577), where the giants of Patagonia are described as worshipping a 'great devil they call Setebos.'"

71. 20. "Right well I wote," &c. 'Faery Queen,' ii., Introduction, 1-3.

72. 25. Lear is founded mainly on Holinshed's 'Chronicle'; the ballad, which is given in Percy's 'Reliques of Ancient Poetry,' is probably of later date than Shakespeare's play.

72. 26. Othello is founded on one of the novels in Giraldi Cinthio's 'Hecatommithi,' first published 1565.

72. 28. **Saxo-Grammaticus** (died 1204?), the most celebrated of the early Danish chroniclers, author of the 'Historia Danica.' His story of Hamlet was given in the 'Histoires Tragiques' of Belleforest, and Shakespeare probably used this French version, or an English translation of it, though no English edition of Belleforest exists of earlier date than 1608.

72. 29. **Holinshed**, or Hollingshead, Raphael (d. 1580?), author of a 'History of Britain.' The first edition appeared in 1578. Shakespeare seems to have used the posthumous second edition (1586-87), which was largely augmented by other writers.

73. 3. "those bodiless creations," &c. 'Hamlet,' III. iv. 138, 139. Cf. p. 25, l. 19.

73. 9. "Your face, my Thane," &c. 'Macbeth,' I. v. 63, 64.

73. 16. Tyrrel and Forrest. See 'Richard III.,' IV. ii.

73. 23. "thick and slab." 'Macbeth,' IV. i. 32.

73. 30. "snatched a wild and fearful joy." Gray, 'Prospect of Eton College,' l. 40. The correct reading is "snatch a fearful joy."

74. 1. **The tales of Boccaccio**—*i.e.*, the 'Decameron,' a collection of a hundred stories told by ten persons, supposed to have fled from Florence and taken refuge in a country villa during the plague of 1348.

74. 2. **Fletcher** died of the plague of 1625.

74. 7. "The course of true love," &c. 'Midsummer-Night's Dream,' I. i. 134.

74. 10. "The age of chivalry," &c. Probably an allusion to the passage in Burke's 'Reflections on the Revolution in France' on Marie Antoinette, ending "But the age of chivalry is gone; that of sophisters, economists, and calculators has succeeded."

74. 24. "Prized black eyes," &c. Sir John Suckling, 'A Session of Poets,' ll. 73, 74. The quotation does not seem to follow well on the preceding statements. It is omitted in some of the later editions.

75. 6. "they heard the tumult, and were still." Cf. Cowper, 'The Task,' iv. 99, 100—

"I behold

The tumult, and am still."

75. 15. 'Midsummer-Night's Dream,' IV. i. 110 *et seq.*; 'Two Noble Kinsmen,' Act III., *passim*.

75. 18. an ingenious and agreeable writer of the present day. Hazlitt probably refers to Nathan Drake, M.D. (1766-1836), who brought out in 1817 two large quarto volumes on 'Shakespeare and his Times.' Five chapters of the first volume are devoted to "a view of country life during the age of Shakespeare," one of them dealing in especial with "its manners and customs, rural holidays and festivals."

75. 32. the 'Return from Parnassus,' or the 'Scourge of Simony,' acted by the students of St John's College, Cambridge, in December 1601, and published in 1606. It was reprinted in the third volume of Hawkins's 'Origin of the English Drama,' 1773. But this play is only the third of a set of three (1597-1601), entitled the 'Pilgrimage to Parnassus,' the 'Return from Parnassus' (i), and the 'Return from Parnassus' (ii); and of these the first two were not published till 1886 (Oxford: edited by W. D. Macray).

76. 3. "Why is't not strange." 'Return from Parnassus,' iii. 2.

76. 17. "it snowed of meat and drink." See Chaucer's 'Prologue,' l. 345.

76. 22. as Mr Lamb observes—in a footnote in his 'Specimens of English Dramatic Poets' (1808), p. 84: "The blank uniformity to which all professional distinctions in apparel have been long hastening is one instance of the Decay of Symbols among us, which, whether it has contributed or not to make us a more intellectual, has certainly made us a less imaginative people."

76. 27. "in act and compliment extern." See 'Othello,' I. i. 61-63:—

"For when my outward action doth demonstrate
The native act and figure of my heart
In compliment extern," &c.

77. 3. Dekker . . . description of a mad-house. In the 'Honest Whore': quoted in Lamb's 'Specimens of English Dramatic Poets.'

77. 10. 'A Mad World, my Masters,' by Thomas Middleton, produced in 1608.

78. 23. Materiam superabat opus. Ovid, 'Metamorphoses,' ii. 5.

IV. SPENSER.

This account of Spenser forms the second part of the second lecture on 'The English Poets.'

81. 8. the Mask of Cupid. 'Faery Queen,' iii. 12; "clap on high," &c., stanza 23.

81. 12. "In green vine leaves," &c. Id., i. 4. 22.

81. 16. "Upon the top of all his lofty crest," &c. Id., i. 7. 32.

82. 6. "mask and antique pageantry." 'L'Allegro,' l. 128.

82. 10. "And more to lull him," &c. 'Faery Queen,' i. 1. 41.

82. 19. "the honey-heavy dew of slumber." 'Julius Cæsar,' II. i. 230.

82. 23. "Eftsoons they heard," &c. 'Faery Queen,' ii. 12. 70, 71.

83. 10. the House of Pride. Id., i. 4. *ad init.*
the Cave of Mammon. Id., ii. 7.

83. 11. the Cave of Despair. Id., i. 9. 33 *et seq.*

83. 13. "the wars he well remembered," &c. Id., ii. 9. 56.

83. 15. the description of Belphebe. Id., ii. 3. 21 *et seq.*
Florimel and the Witch's son. Id., iii. 7. 12 *et seq.*

83. 16. the Gardens of Adonis. Id., iii. 6. 29 *et seq.*

83. 17. the Bower of Bliss. Id., ii. 12. 42 *et seq.*

83. 28. Poussin, Nicolas (1594-1665), sometimes called the head of the French school. He was for a time painter in ordinary to Louis XIII., but he lived mostly in Rome. See an essay "On a Landscape by Nicolas Poussin" in Hazlitt's 'Criticisms on Art.'

84. 1. "And eke that stranger knight," &c. 'Faery Queen,' iii. 9. 20.

84. 10. Belphebe . . . flowers and blossoms. Id., ii. 3. 30.

84. 16. "The cold icicles," &c. Id., iii. 8. 35.

84. 20. "That was Arion crowned," &c. Id., iv. 11. 23, 24.

84. 27. "And by his side," &c. Id., i. 4. 21, 22.

85. 11. "And next to him," &c. Id., i. 4. 24-26.

85. 34. Southey, in 'Carmen Nuptiale, The Lay of the Laureate' (1816), ll. 106-108.

86. 3. In reading these descriptions. A long quotation from the 'Mask of Cupid' is here omitted, and to it "these descriptions" partly refer.

86. 4. Rubens, Peter Paul (1577-1640), the head of the Flemish school.

86. 5. Satyrane's taming the lion's whelps, &c. 'Faery Queen,' i. 6. 24 *et seq.*; "go find some other play-fellows," stanza 28.

86. 16. "his fair horns on height." Id., iii. 10. 47.

86. 29. the Cave of Despair, . . . of Mammon. See above.

86. 31. change of Malbecco into Jealousy. Id., iii. 10, conclusion.

87. 3. "That house's form," &c. Id., ii. 7. 28, 29, and 23.

87. note. 'Troilus and Cressida,' III. iii. 176-179.

88. 5. "High over hills," &c. 'Faery Queen,' iii. 10. 55.

88. 19. Talus, the Iron Man. Id., v. 1. 12 *et seq.*
episode of Pastorella. Id., vi. 9-12.

88. 28. This stanza . . . is borrowed from the Italians. This was the usual view in Hazlitt's time, but the Spenserian stanza, whose rhyming formula is *ababbcbcc*, has only four lines in common with the *ottava rima* (*abababcc*) of the Italians. It is much more akin to the seven-lined Chaucer stanza or Rhyme Royal (*ababbcc*); while William Dunbar, the Scottish poet, uses occasionally an eight-lined stanza of identical construction with the first eight lines of the Spenserian stanza. But it is the Alexandrine which gives the Spenserian stanza its distinctive character. It may be noted that the first nine lines of the Spenserian sonnet rhyme identically with the stanza, the only difference being the number of syllables in the ninth line.

89. 11. "many a winding bout," &c. 'L'Allegro,' ll. 139, 140.

V. SHAKESPEARE.

This forms the first part of the third lecture on 'The English Poets.'

92. 1. Raphael, Titian, Michael Angelo. See above.

92. 2. Correggio, Antonio Allegri da (1494-1534). "He lived and died obscurely in an obscure village. We have few of his works, but they are all perfect. What truth, what grace, what angelic sweetness are there! Not one line or tone that is not divinely soft or exquisitely fair, the painter's mind

rejecting, by a natural process, all that is discordant, coarse, or unpleasing. The whole is an emanation of pure thought."—Hazlitt, "Whether Genius is Conscious of its Powers" in the 'Plain Speaker.'

92. 16. **Guido.** See above.

92. 17. **Vandyke**, Anthony (1599-1641), one of the Dutch school, and a pupil of Rubens, settled in England in 1632. He was knighted by Charles I. See Hazlitt's essay "On a Portrait by Vandyke" in the 'Plain Speaker.'

92. 31. "**human face divine.**" 'Paradise Lost,' iii. 44.

93. 3. "**And made a sunshine,**" &c. 'Faery Queen,' i. 3, 4.

93. 11. "**the fault has been more in their stars,**" &c. See 'Julius Cæsar,' I. ii. 140, 141.

95. 5. "**All corners of the world,**" &c. 'Cymbeline,' III. iv. 39, 40.

95. 19. "**nodded to him,**" &c. See 'Midsummer-Night's Dream,' III. i. 177.

95. 21. "**so potent art.**" 'Tempest,' V. i. 50.

95. 33. "**subject to the same skyey influences.**" 'Measure for Measure,' III. i. 9: "Servile to all the skyey influences."

96. 7. "**his frequent haunts,**" &c. 'Comus,' l. 314: "My daily walks and ancient neighbourhood."

96. 10. "**coheres semblably together.**" Cf. '2 Henry IV.,' V. i. 72, "to see the semblable coherence"; and 'Twelfth Night,' V. i. 258, 259—

"Till each circumstance
Of place, time, fortune, do cohere."

96. 21. "**Me and thy crying self.**" 'Tempest,' I. ii. 132.

96. 28. "**What! man, ne'er pull your hat,**" &c. 'Macbeth,' IV. iii. 208.

96. 32. "**Man delights not me,**" &c. 'Hamlet,' II. ii. 321-323.

97. 9. "**a combination and a form.**" Id., III. iv. 60.

97. 23. "**My lord, as I was sewing,**" &c. Id., II. i. 77-100.

98. 21. "**There is a willow,**" &c. Id., IV. vii. 167, 168.

98. 32. "**He's speaking now,**" &c. 'Antony and Cleopatra,' I. v. 24, 25.

99. 4. "**It is my birthday,**" &c. Id., III. xiii. 185-187.

101. 16. "**to make society the sweeter welcome.**" 'Macbeth,' III. i. 42, 43.

102. 7. "**Look where he comes! Not poppy,**" &c. 'Othello,' III. iii. 330-333.

103. 1. "**rage with rage doth sympathise.**" 'Troilus and Cressida,' I. iii. 52.

103. 15. "**in their untroubled element,**" &c. Wordsworth, 'Excursion,' vi. 763-776—

"That glorious star
In its untroubled element will shine,
As now it shines, when we are laid in earth
And safe from all our sorrows."

103. 30. "**Oh that I were a mockery king,**" &c. 'Richard II.,' IV. i. 260-262—

"Oh that I were a mockery king of snow,
Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke,
To melt myself away in water-drops!"

104. 3. "**His form had not yet lost,**" &c. 'Paradise Lost,' i. 591-594.

104. 10. **a modern school of poetry.** The Lake School: see the following account of Wordsworth.

105. 3. "**with what measure,**" &c. Mark iv. 24; Luke vi. 38.

105. 7. "**It glances from heaven to earth,**" &c. See 'Midsummer-Night's Dream,' V. i. 13. The passage is quoted on p. 24.

105. 10. "**puts a girdle round about the earth,**" &c. 'Midsummer-Night's Dream,' II. i. 175, 176.

105. 31. "**I ask that I may waken reverence,**" &c. 'Troilus and Cressida,' I. iii. 227-230.

106. 3. "**No man is the lord of any thing,**" &c. Id., III. iii. 115-123.

106. 12. "**Rouse yourself,**" &c. Id., III. iii. 222-225.

107. 3. Hazlitt makes a similar statement in his essay "On Application to Study" in the 'Plain Speaker.' "There is scarcely a word in any of his more striking passages," he says, "that can be altered for the better. If any person, for instance, is trying to recollect a favourite line, and cannot hit upon some particular expression, it is in vain to think of substituting any other so good. That in the original text is not merely the best, but it seems the only right one." He gives two instances, and adds, "I could multiply such examples, but that I am sure the reader will easily supply them himself; and they show sufficiently that Shakespeare was not (as he is

often represented) a loose or clumsy writer." None the less the reader will have already noted that Hazlitt's quotations from Shakespeare, any more than from any other writer, are not remarkable for their accuracy.

107. 8. "**Light thickens,**" &c. 'Macbeth,' III. ii. 50, 51.

107. 18. **Othello's apology to the Senate.** 'Othello,' I. iii. 76 *et seq.* : "my whole course of love," l. 91.

107. 22. "**the business of the state,**" &c. 'Othello,' IV. ii. 166.

107. 28. "**ditties highly penned,**" &c. '1 Henry IV.,' III. i. 209-211.

108. 4. "**And so by many winding nooks,**" &c. 'Two Gentlemen of Verona,' II. vii. 31, 32.

108. 24. "**great vulgar and the small.**" Cowley, translation of Horace's Ode, iii. 1. in his essay 'Of Greatness'—

"Hence, ye profane ; I hate ye all,
Both the great vulgar and the small."

109. 3. **blunders in chronology and geography.** Such as the reference to the seaboard of Bohemia in the 'Winter's Tale,' the allusion in the same play to Julio Romano (1492-1546) as living in the time of the oracle of Delphi, and Hector's mention of Aristotle in 'Troilus and Cressida.'

109. 6. **the unities,** the dramatic unities of time, place, and action, adhered to in the classical drama. It was Shakespeare's non-observance of these rules which ultimately led to "Voltaire's criticisms," though Voltaire could boast that he was the first to make Shakespeare known in France. (See M. Jusserand's 'Shakespeare in France' for an account of the change in Voltaire's attitude.)

109. 14. "**his delights did show most dolphin-like.**" Cf. 'Antony and Cleopatra,' V. ii. 88, 89.

VI. MILTON.

This forms the latter portion of the third lecture on 'The English Poets.'

110. 20. "**Blind Thamyris.**" 'Paradise Lost,' iii. 35, 36.

111. 3. "**Sad task!**" &c. Id., ix. 13-15, 20, 44, 45.

111. 13. "**In darkness,**" &c. Id., vii. 27.

111. 17. "piling up every stone," &c. Id., xi. 324, 325.
111. 20. "For after . . . I had for my first years," &c. 'The Reason of Church Government,' Book II., Introduction.
113. 4. "The noble heart," &c. 'Faery Queen,' i. 5. 1.
113. 19. "makes Ossa like a wart." 'Hamlet,' V. i. 306.
114. 7. "Him followed Rimmon," &c. 'Paradise Lost,' i. 467-469.
114. 13. "As when a vulture," &c. Id., iii. 431-439.
115. 12. "the great vision of the guarded mount." 'Lycidas,' i. 161.
115. 14. "the pilot," &c. 'Paradise Lost,' i. 204.
115. 16. "the wandering moon." 'Il Penseroso,' ll. 67-70.
116. 3. "Wild above rule," &c. 'Paradise Lost,' v. 297.
116. 13. "like a steam," &c. 'Comus,' l. 556.
116. 31. "He soon Saw within ken," &c. 'Paradise Lost,' iii. 621-644.
117. 28. "With Atlantean shoulders," &c. Id., ii. 306, 307.
117. 30. "lay floating many a rood." Id., i. 196.
117. 31. "that sea beast Leviathan," &c. Id., i. 200-202.
118. 10. Dr Johnson says, in the conclusion to the 'Life of Milton,'—"The music of the English heroic line strikes the ear so faintly that it is easily lost unless all the syllables of every line co-operate together. This co-operation can be only obtained by the preservation of every verse unmingled with another as a distinct system of sounds; and this distinctness is obtained and preserved by the artifice of rhyme. . . . Poetry may subsist without rhyme, but English poetry will not often please; nor can rhyme ever be safely spared but where the subject is able to support itself. Blank verse makes some approach to that which is called the *lapidary style*,—has neither the easiness of prose nor the melody of numbers, and therefore tires by long continuance." But Johnson goes on to say: "Whatever be the advantage of rhyme, I cannot prevail on myself to wish that Milton had been a rhymer; for I cannot wish his work to be other than it is."
119. 1. "His hand was known," &c. 'Paradise Lost,' i. 732-747.
119. 13. "But chief the spacious hall," &c. Id., i. 762-788.
119. 37. "Round he surveys," &c. Id., iii. 555-567.
120. 14. "Such as the meeting soul," &c. 'L'Allegro,' ll. 138-140.
120. 21. "the hidden soul of harmony." Id., l. 144.

120. 30. "God the Father turns a school divine." Pope, 'Epistle to Augustus,' l. 102.

121. 29. "As when Heaven's fire," &c. 'Paradise Lost,' i. 612, 613.

122. 7. "All is not lost," &c. Id., i. 106-109.

122. 27. "this intellectual being," &c. Id., ii. 147, 148.

122. 30. "swallowed up and lost," &c. Id., ii. 149, 150.

122. 32. "Fallen cherub," &c. Id., i. 157, 158.

123. 14. "aloft incumbent on the dusky air." Id., i. 226.

123. 18. Cf. Hazlitt's essay "On Reading Old Books" in the 'Plain Speaker': "It is a sufficient answer to the German criticism which has since been started against the character of Satan (viz., that it is not one of disgusting deformity, or pure, defecated malice), to say that Milton has there drawn not the abstract principle of evil, not a devil incarnate, but a fallen angel. This is the Scriptural account, and the poet has followed it. . . . Let us hear no more, then, of this monkish cant and bigoted outcry for the restoration of the horns and tail of the devil!"

124. 11. "Is this the region," &c. 'Paradise Lost,' i. 242-263.

125. 3. **Salmasius**, Claudius, the Latinised form of Claude de Saumaise (1588-1658), a professor at Leyden, and one of the most eminent scholars of his time. He brought out in 1649, at the request of Charles II., the 'Defensio Regia pro Carolo I.' To this Milton replied in 1651 in the 'Defensio pro Populo Anglicano.'

125. 5. "With hideous ruin and combustion dire." 'Paradise Lost,' i. 46—

"With hideous ruin and combustion, down
To bottomless perdition."

125. 8. "retreated in a silent valley," &c. Id., ii. 547-550.

125. 24. **a character**. Probably Napoleon.

126. 7. **Longinus**. "Having written the 'Iliad' in the youth and vigour of his genius, he has furnished it with continued scenes of action and combat; whereas the greatest part of the 'Odyssey' consists of narration, the characteristic of old age. So that in the 'Odyssey' Homer may with justice be likened to the setting sun, whose grandeur still remains, without the meridian heat of his beams. For the style is not so grand and majestic as that of the 'Iliad,' the sublimity not kept

up in so uniform and sustained a manner throughout; the tides of passion flow not so copiously nor in such rapid succession; there is not the same fertility of invention and oratorical energy; nor is the work adorned with such a throng of images drawn from real life." (Longinus, 'On the Sublime,' section 9.)

126. 15. "no kind of traffic," &c. See 'Tempest,' II. i. 148-161.

126. 23. "The generations were prepared," &c. Wordsworth, 'Excursion,' vi. 554-557. Cf. p. 169. This was one of Hazlitt's favourite quotations.

126. 28. "with loss of Eden." 'Paradise Lost,' i. 4.

127. 10. "where no crude surfeit reigned." 'Comus,' l. 480.

127. 16. "know to know no more." Cf. Cowper, 'Truth,' l. 327, "just knows, and knows no more" (see p. 164, l. 16).

"They toiled not," &c. See St Matthew vi. 28, 29.

127. 22. "In them the burthen," &c. Wordsworth, 'Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey' (1798), ll. 38-41—

"that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened."

127. 29. "such as angels weep." 'Paradise Lost,' i. 620.

128. 11. "In either hand," &c. Id., xii. 637-647.

VII. DRYDEN AND POPE.

This forms the fourth lecture on 'The English Poets.'

129. 3. **Chaucer.** Hazlitt had treated of Chaucer in the first half of his second lecture.

130. 9. The following passage, down to "pleased or surprised" on p. 134, l. 29, appeared in 'The Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany' (a new series of the 'Scots Magazine') for February 1818. There are a few textual variations, but they are slight. The chief difference is the absence in the magazine article of the remarks on Homer and Shakespeare, p. 131 l. 27 to p. 132 l. 2.

132. 23. "the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow." 'Romeo and Juliet,' III. v. 20.

133. 24. **Martha Blount** (1690-1762) was to Pope "the object of a lifelong sentiment, oscillating between friendship and a deeper feeling, but tinged to the last with the warm hues of an unselfish devotion." See the Globe edition of 'Pope,' p. xxx. Pope dedicated to her, among other things, the epistle 'Of the Characters of Women' ('Moral Essays,' ii.), and he remembered her generously in his will.

133. 26. "In Fortune's ray," &c. 'Troilus and Cressida,' I. iii. 47-54.

135. 5. "More subtle web," &c. 'Faery Queen,' ii. 12. 77.

136. 19. "from her fair head," &c. 'Rape of the Lock,' iii. 154.

136. 21. "Now meet thy fate," &c. Id., v. 87-96.

136. 33. **Boileau Despréaux**, Nicolas (1636-1711), the great French critic of the age of Louis XIV., published in 1674, along with his 'Art Poétique,' the first four cantos of the 'Lutrin.' Two other cantos followed in 1683. It is an heroi-comical poem recounting the quarrels of certain churchmen regarding the position of a lectern (*lutrin*).

137. 8. "'Tis with our judgments," &c. 'Essay on Criticism,' ll. 9, 10.

137. 18. "Still green with bays," &c. Id., ll. 181-184, 189-192.

137. 32. **grows obsolete and unintelligible.** Cf. the 'Essay on Criticism,' ll. 478-483—

"No longer now that golden age appears
When Patriarch-wits survived a thousand years:
Now length of Fame (our second life) is lost,
And bare threescore is all even that can boast;
Our sons their fathers' failing language see,
And such as Chaucer is, shall Dryden be."

138. 4. "little bark," &c. 'Essay on Man,' iv. 383-386.

138. 10. **a cant in the present day about genius.** See p. 189, l. 27, and cf. the quotation in note, 20. 3.

139. 16. "There died," &c. 'Eloisa to Abelard,' l. 40.

140. 22. "If ever chance," &c. Id., ll. 347, 348.

140. 25. "**Bolingbroke.**" For Pope's indebtedness to Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke (1678-1751), see the Globe edition of 'Pope,' pp. 189, 190.

140. 27. "**he spins the thread of his verbosity**," &c. 'Love's Labour's Lost,' V. i. 18, 19. "He spins" should read "he draweth out."

140. 28. "**the very words**," &c. Cf. 'Macbeth,' I. iii. 88: "to the selfsame tune and words."

141. 1. **already quoted**. See p. 32.

141. 12. "**Virtue may choose**," &c. 'Epilogue to the Satires, Dialogue I.,' ll. 137-172.

142. 15. **Chartres**. See the 'Epistle to Lord Bathurst' ('Moral Essays,' iii.)

142. 21. **Where Murray**, &c. 'Epistle to Mr May, ll. 52, 53. William Murray (1705-1793), appointed Lord Chief Justice in 1756, and created Earl of Mansfield in 1776.

142. 24. "**Why rail they then**," &c. 'Epilogue to the Satires, Dialogue II.,' ll. 138, 139.

142. 28. "**Despise low joys**," &c. 'Epistle to Mr Murray,' ll. 60-62. Henry Hyde, Viscount Cornbury, afterwards Lord Hyde (1710-1753), was the great-grandson of the first Lord Clarendon. In 1732 he was offered a handsome pension, but he refused it with the words, "How could you tell that I was to be sold? or, at least, how could you know my price so exactly?" Bolingbroke addressed to him his 'Letters on the Study and Use of History.'

A parallel passage occurs in the essay "Of Persons one would Wish to have Seen," in 'Winterslow.' It may be quoted in full, as it affords a good illustration of Hazlitt's habit of incorporating the same matter in different writings, and indicates the nature of his debt to the conversation of his literary friends (cf. p. 148, ll. 1-12, and p. 175, ll. 24-32).

"I thought," said A——, turning short round upon Lamb, "that you of the Lake School did not like Pope?" "Not like Pope! My dear sir, you must be under a mistake—I can read him over and over for ever!" "Why, certainly the 'Essay on Man' must be allowed to be a masterpiece." "It may be so, but I seldom look into it." "Oh! then it's his 'Satires' you admire?" "No, not his 'Satires,' but his friendly 'Epistles' and his compliments." "Compliments; I did not know he ever made any." "The finest," said Lamb, "that were ever paid by the wit of man. Each of them is worth an estate for life, nay, is an immortality. There is that superb one to Lord Cornbury—

‘Despise low joys, low gains ;
Disdain whatever Cornbury disdains ;
Be virtuous, and be happy for your pains.’

Was there ever more artful insinuation of idolatrous praise ?
And then that noble apotheosis of his friend Lord Mansfield
(however little deserved), when, speaking of the House of
Lords, he adds—

‘Conspicuous scene ! another yet is nigh
(More silent far) where kings and poets lie ;
Where Murray (long enough his country’s pride)
Shall be no more than Tully, or than Hyde !’

And with what a fine turn of indignant flattery he addresses
Lord Bolingbroke—

‘Why rail they then, if but one wreath of mine,
Oh ! all-accomplished St John, deck thy shrine ?’

Or turn,” continued Lamb, with a slight hectic on his cheek
and his eye glistening, “to his list of early friends,—

‘But why then publish ? Granville the polite,
And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write,’” &c.

Here his voice totally failed him, and, throwing down the
book, he said, “Do you think I would not wish to have been
friends with such a man as this ?”

143. 2. character of Addison. ‘Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot,’ ll.
193-214.

143. 7. “Alas ! how changed,” &c. ‘Moral Essays,’ iii.
305-308.

143. 16. “Why did I write ?” &c. ‘Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot,’
ll. 125-146.

144. 3. “Oh, lasting as those colours,” &c. ‘Epistle to Mr
Jervas,’ ll. 63-78. Charles Jervas, or Jervis (1675-1739), gave
Pope lessons on painting about 1713 ; he is best known as the
translator of ‘Don Quixote.’

144. 22. “who have eyes, but they see not,” &c Cf.
Psalms cxv. 5, &c., and cxxxv. 16, &c.

144. 29. “I lisped in numbers,” &c. See p. 143, l. 19.

144. 30. *Et quum conabar scribere, versus erat.* This is an
inaccurate quotation from Ovid, ‘Tristia,’ iv. 10. 26. The

correct reading is—"et quod tentabam dicere versus erat," or "quicquid conabar dicere versus erat."

145. 10. Cf. Hazlitt's essay "On the Prose Style of Poets" in the 'Plain Speaker': "Dryden's [prose style] is perfectly unexceptionable, and a model in simplicity, strength, and perspicuity, for the subjects he treated of."

145. 27. **character of Achitophel.** 'Absalom and Achitophel,' i. 150 *et seq.*

146. 21. "Besides these jolly birds," &c. 'Hind and the Panther,' iii. 991-1025.

147. 31. 'Ode on St Cecilia'—*i.e.*, 'Alexander's Feast, or the Power of Music: A Song in honour of St Cecilia's Day, 1697.' Dryden wrote also 'A Song for St Cecilia's Day, November 22, 1687.'

148. 3. "The jolly god," &c. 'Alexander's Feast,' ll. 49-52. Cf. p. 175, from which it appears that Wordsworth passed the same criticism on these lines.

148. 12. **Titian or Rubens.** See above.

148. *note.* "To begin then with Shakespeare," &c. Dryden, 'Essay of Dramatic Poesy.'

149. 6. 'Tancred and Sigismunda,' more correctly 'Sigismunda and Guiscardo.'

149. 17. "Thou gladder," &c. 'Palamon and Arcite,' iii. 145.

150. 11. **the poetry of paradox.** Cf. the following passage in Hazlitt's lecture 'On the Living Poets': "Our poetical literature had, towards the close of the last century, degenerated into the most trite, insipid, and mechanical of all things, in the hands of the followers of Pope and the old French school of poetry. It wanted something to stir it up, and it found that something in the principles and events of the French Revolution. From the impulse it thus received, it rose at once from the most servile imitation and tamest commonplace to the utmost pitch of singularity and paradox. The change in the belles-lettres was as complete, and to many persons as startling, as the change in politics with which it went hand in hand. There was a mighty ferment in the heads of statesmen and poets, kings and people. According to the prevailing notions, all was to be natural and new," &c.

VIII. THOMSON AND COWPER.

This forms the fifth lecture on 'The English Poets.'

151. 3. Dr Johnson. See the conclusion of his 'Life of Thomson': "The highest praise which he has received ought not to be suppressed: it is said by Lord Lyttelton in the prologue to his posthumous play that his works contained

'No line which dying he could wish to blot.'

151. 12. Bubb Dodington (1691-1762), a notorious place-hunter, with the redeeming quality of being a patron of literature. Thomson dedicated his 'Summer' to him. Dodington was created Baron Melcombe in 1761.

151. 13. "Would he had blotted a thousand." An allusion to Ben. Jonson's 'Discoveries,' section "De Shakespeare Nostrati": "I remember the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare that in his writing (whatsoever he penned) he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, 'Would he had blotted a thousand,' which they thought a malevolent speech."

153. 1. "Come, gentle Spring," &c. 'Spring,' ll. 1-4.

153. 12. "And see where surly Winter," &c. Id., ll. 11-25.

155. 1. a man of genius. Coleridge: see p. 204, l. 12 *et seq.*

155. 14. "a burnished fly." 'Castle of Indolence,' i. 64. 1—

"As when in prime of June a burnished fly."

155. 17. "For whom the merry bells," &c. Id., i. 62. 8, 9.

155. 19. all was "one full-swelling bed." Id., i. 33. 9—

"So that each spacious room was one full-swelling bed."

155. 21. "the stock-dove's plaint," &c. Id., i. 4, 6, 7.

"The stock-dove's plaint" reads "or stock-dove's plain."

155. 27. Warton. See note 41. 31. The passage referred to occurs on pp. 43-49 of the third edition of the 'Essay on Pope' (1772). Wordsworth makes a similar reference to Warton in his 'Prose Prefaces.'

155. 30. Cartagena. 'Summer,' l. 1040 *et seq.*

155. 31. "the frequent corse," &c. Id., ll. 1048, 1049.

156. 4. "Breathed hot," &c. Id., ll. 961-979.

156. 24. "the inhuman rout," &c. 'Autumn,' ll. 439-444.
 157. 1. "There through the prison," &c. 'Winter,' ll. 799-809.
 157. 20. "where pure Niemi's," &c. Id., ll. 875, 876.
 157. 23. The traveller. Id., l. 920 *et seq.*
 157. 31. "Through the hushed air," &c. Id., ll. 229-264.
 158. 37. Enfield's 'Speaker' was the most popular elocutionary book of its time. The first edition appeared in 1774, with the sub-title 'Miscellaneous Pieces selected from the Best English Writers.' It was one of the numerous publications of William Enfield (1741-1797), a nonconformist divine of Warrington and Norwich.
 158. 39. Palemon and Lavinia. 'Autumn,' l. 177 *et seq.*
 159. 1. Damon and Musidora. 'Summer,' l. 1269 *et seq.*
 Celadon and Amelia. Id., l. 1171 *et seq.*
 161. 3. crazy Kate. 'The Task,' i. 534-556.
 161. 7. loud-hissing urn. Cf. id., iv. 38.
 161. 29. the post coming in. Id., iv. 1 *et seq.*
 preparations for tea. Id., iv. 36 *et seq.*
 161. 30. unexpected fall of snow. Id., iv. 311 *et seq.*
 161. 31. the frosty morning. Id., v. 1 *et seq.*
 162. 7. "The night was winter," &c. Id., vi. 57-117.
 163. 37. The first volume of Cowper's poems, published in 1782, contained 'Table-Talk,' 'The Progress of Error,' 'Truth,' 'Expostulation,' 'Hope,' 'Charity,' 'Conversation,' 'Retirement,' 'Verses Supposed to be Written by Alexander Selkirk,' &c.
 164. 6. "Yon cottager," &c. 'Truth,' ll. 317-336.
 164. 26. Whitfield (or Whitefield), George (1714-1770), one of the founders of Methodism.
 164. 29. "But if, unblamable," &c. 'Hope,' ll. 622-634.
 165. 6. the Monthly Reviewers. Cf. p. 4, l. 24 *et seq.*

IX. WORDSWORTH.

This is the account of Wordsworth in the 'Spirit of the Age, or Contemporary Portraits' (1825).

166. 6. "lowliness is young ambition's ladder." 'Julius Cæsar,' II. i. 22.
 166. 10. "no figures nor no fantasies," &c. Id., II. i. 231, 232; *passion* instead of *care*.

167. 2. "**skyey influences.**" Cf. p. 96, l. 1.
 167. 8. "**Nihil humani,**" &c. Terence, 'Heautontimoroumenos' i. 1. 25.
 168. 10. "**the cloud-capt towers,**" &c. 'Tempest,' IV. i. 151-156.
 168. 20. "**the judge's robe,**" &c. 'Measure for Measure,' II. ii. 59 and 61: quoted freely.
 169. 1. Cf. the reference to the Lake School on p. 104.
 169. 8. "**a sense of joy To the bare trees,**" &c. Wordsworth, 'To my Sister' (1798), ll. 6-8.
 169. 17. "**Beneath the hills,**" &c. 'The Excursion,' vi. 553-557. The first line should read—

"Amid the groves, under the shadowy hills."

Cf. p. 126.

170. 32. "**To him the meanest flower,**" &c. 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality,' last two lines. There is a parallel passage to the present in Hazlitt's essay "On Genius and Common Sense" in 'Table-Talk': "He hangs a weight of thought and feeling upon every trifling circumstance connected with his past history. The note of the cuckoo sounds in his ear like the voice of other years; the daisy spreads its leaves in the rays of boyish delight that stream from his thoughtful eyes; the rainbow lifts its proud arch in heaven but to mark his progress from infancy to manhood; an old thorn is buried, bowed down under the mass of associations he has wound about it; and to him, as he himself beautifully says,—

'The meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.'

172. 26. "**Calm contemplation and majestic pains.**" Cf. 'Laodamia,' l. 72—

"Calm pleasures there abide, majestic pains."

173. 19. "**Fall blunted,**" &c. Goldsmith's 'Traveller,' l. 232—

"Fall blunted from each indurated heart."

173. 23. "**and fit audience,**" &c. 'Paradise Lost,' vii. 31.

174. 18. **toujours perdrix**—*i.e.*, "always partridges," an allusion to the story of how a French king avenged himself

on his confessor, who had reproved him for his conjugal infidelities, by having his confessor served day after day with what he had chosen as his favourite dish—which happened to be partridges—and allowing him no change in his fare. The story is as old as the ‘Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles’ (1432).

174. 21. **Holbein**, Hans, the younger (1494 or 1495-1543), one of the first painters of the German school. He resided in England from about 1532.

174. 27. Cf. p. 201, l. 10 *et seq.*

174. 32. “of no mark or likelihood.” ‘1 Henry IV.,’ III. ii. 45.

175. 14. Cf. p. 196, l. 27 *et seq.*

175. 24. See above, p. 148, l. 1 *et seq.*

176. 7. Wordsworth gave three renderings from Chaucer in 1801—the ‘Prioress’s Tale,’ the ‘Cuckoo and the Nightingale,’ and ‘Troilus and Cressida.’

176. 23. “**Action is momentary**,” &c. ‘The Borderers,’ iii. final scene. The correct quotation is:—

“Action is transitory . . .

The motion of a muscle, this way or that ; . . .

Suffering is permanent, obscure, and dark.”

“This and the five lines that follow,” says Wordsworth (‘Poems,’ ed. John Morley, p. 803), “were either read or recited by me, more than thirty years since, to the late Mr Hazlitt, who quoted some expressions in them (imperfectly remembered) in a work of his published several years ago.”

176. 28. See Wordsworth’s ‘Prose Prefaces.’

177. 16. **Drawcansir**. See note 5. 5.

177. 23. **Paley**, William (1743-1805), author of ‘Moral and Political Philosophy’ (1785), ‘Horæ Paulinæ’ (1790—his most original work), ‘Evidences of Christianity’ (1794), and ‘Natural Theology’ (1802). See p. 194, l. 8 *et seq.*

177. 26. **Bewick**, Thomas (1753-1828), a noted English wood-engraver, the illustrator of Gay’s ‘Fables,’ ‘Select Fables,’ Goldsmith’s ‘Traveller’ and ‘Deserted Village,’ Parnell’s ‘Hermit,’ a ‘General History of Quadrupeds,’ and a ‘History of British Birds.’

177. 27. **Waterloo**, Anthoine (1609 or 1610-c.1676), a French artist, best known as an engraver and etcher. His pictures generally represent forest scenes.

177. 30. **Nicolas Poussin.** See above, p. 83, l. 28.

178. 7. **Rembrandt.** See above, p. 35, l. 29.

178. 15. Cf. Hazlitt's description of a "thorough adept" of the Lake school in his lectures on 'The English Poets': "He hates all science and all art; he hates chemistry; he hates conchology; . . . he hates all poetry but his own; he hates the dialogues in Shakespeare; he hates music, dancing, and painting; he hates Rubens; he hates Rembrandt; . . . he hates the Venus of Medicis." The proofs of these hatreds, says Hazlitt, are to be found in Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth.

178. 21. "**Where one for sense,**" &c. 'Hudibras,' ii. 1. 23, 24.

179. 19. **we have called,** in the account of Byron in the 'Spirit of the Age.' Cf. also Hazlitt's essay on 'Pope, Lord Byron, and Mr Bowles': "His lordship, as a poet, is a little headstrong and self-willed, a spoiled child of nature and fortune."

X. MY FIRST ACQUAINTANCE WITH POETS.

This essay appeared originally in 1823 in the third of the four numbers of 'The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South,' a review edited by Leigh Hunt, and intended as a rival to the 'Edinburgh' and 'Quarterly.' The essay was expanded from a letter contributed to the 'Examiner' in 1817. The letter was reprinted in 'Political Tracts,' 1819, while the essay was included in the posthumous collection entitled 'Winterslow,' 1850.

181. 3. "**dreaded name of Demogorgon.**" 'Paradise Lost,' ii. 964, 965.

181. 22. "**fluttering the proud Salopians.**" Cf. 'Coriolanus,' V. vi. 115, 116.

182. 3. "**High-born Hoel's harp,**" &c. Gray's 'Bard,' l. 28.

182. 16. "**bound them, with Styx,**" &c. Pope's 'Ode on St Cecilia's Day' (1708), ll. 90, 91. Cf. Virgil, 'Georgics,' IV., 480, "novies Styx interfusa coerces."

182. 26. **I owe to Coleridge.** Cf. Hazlitt's essay "On Reading Old Books" in the 'Plain Speaker': "I believe I may date my insight into the mysteries of poetry from the com-

mencement of my acquaintance with the authors of the 'Lyrical Ballads'; at least the discrimination of the higher sorts, not my predilection for such writers as Goldsmith or Pope: nor do I imagine they will say I got my liking for the Novelists or the comic writers . . . from them. If so, I must have got from them what they never had themselves. In points where poetic diction and conception are concerned, I may be at a loss, and liable to be imposed upon; but in forming an estimate of passages relating to common life and manners, I cannot think I am a plagiarist from any man. I there 'know my cue without a prompter.' I may say of such studies *Intus et in cute*. I am just able to admire those literal touches of observation and description which persons of loftier pretensions overlook and despise."

183. 21. **Il y a des impressions**, &c. Rousseau, 'Confessions.' Hazlitt alludes to this quotation in his essay "On the Character of Rousseau" in the 'Round Table': the years when he read Rousseau's 'Confessions,' he says, were "the happiest years of our life. . . . There are indeed impressions which neither time nor circumstances can efface."

183. 29. **"rose like a stream,"** &c. 'Comus,' l. 556. "Stream" is a misreading for "steam."

184. 23. **"Such were the notes,"** &c. Pope's 'Epistle to the Earl of Oxford,' l. 1.

185. 6. **"Like to that sanguine flower,"** &c. 'Lycidas,' l. 106.

185. 21. **"As are the children,"** &c. Thomson's 'Castle of Indolence,' ii. 33. 7—

"Bright as the children of yon azure sheen."

185. 27. **Murillo and Velasquez.** See note on 10. 11.

185. 31. **nothing—like what he has done.** Cf. p. 192, l. 6. "Mr Coleridge," says Hazlitt, in the 'Spirit of the Age,' "delights in nothing but episodes and digressions, neglects whatever he undertakes to perform, and can act only on spontaneous impulses, without object or method. 'He cannot be constrained by mastery.' While he should be occupied with a given pursuit, he is thinking of a thousand other things; a thousand tastes, a thousand objects tempt him and distract his mind, which keeps open house and entertains all comers; and after being fatigued and amused with morning calls from idle visitors, finds the day consumed and 'its business unconcluded.' In the essay 'On Depth and Superficiality,' in the

'Plain Speaker,' he alludes to Coleridge as 'a great but useless thinker.'

186. 11. "somewhat fat and pursy." See 'Hamlet,' III. iv. 153.

186. 25. **Adam Smith** (1723-1790), author of the 'Wealth of Nations' (1776) and founder of the science of political economy, was appointed professor of Moral Philosophy in Glasgow in 1752. In 1759 he published his 'Theory of Moral Sentiments.'

187. 15. "no figures nor no fantasies." 'Julius Cæsar,' II. i. 231.

188. 26. **Mary Wollstonecraft** (1759-1797), authoress of the 'Vindication of the Rights of Women' (1792). She married William Godwin (see below) in 1797.

188. 27. **Mackintosh**, Sir James (1765-1832), brought out in 1791 'Vindiciæ Gallicæ,' a 'Defence of the French Revolution and its English Admirers against the Accusations of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke.' Mackintosh figures in the 'Spirit of the Age,' and the account of him there contains an interesting comparison with Coleridge. "They have nearly an equal range of reading and of topics of conversation; but in the mind of the one we see nothing but fixtures, in the other everything is fluid. The ideas of the one are as formal and tangible as those of the other are shadowy and evanescent. Sir James Mackintosh walks over the ground, Mr Coleridge is always flying from off it. The first knows all that has been said upon a subject; the last has something to say that was never said before. If the one deals too much in learned commonplaces, the other teems with idle fancies. . . . The one is an Encyclopædia of knowledge, the other is a succession of *Sibylline Leaves*."

188. note. Hazlitt's father published in 1790 'Discourses for the Use of Families on the Advantages of a Free Inquiry and on the Study of the Scriptures.' An edition of 'Sermons for the Use of Families,' in two volumes, appeared in 1808.

189. 19. **Tom Wedgwood** (1771-1805), son of Josiah Wedgwood of pottery fame, is chiefly interesting as being the first photographer. The little he wrote was of a scientific nature, and is preserved in the 'Transactions of the Royal Society'; but he had many literary friends. Coleridge wrote a "full portrait of his friend's mind and character," but it is unfortunately lost.

189. 31. Godwin, William (1756-1836), author of the 'Enquiry concerning Political Justice' (1793), which made him the "philosophic representative of English Radicalism," and 'Caleb Williams' (1794), a novel illustrative of his political doctrines. Hazlitt describes him in the 'Spirit of the Age.'

190. 6. Holcroft, Thomas (1745-1809), actor, dramatist, and novelist. His chief novels are 'Alwyn, or the Gentleman Comedian,' 'Anna St Ives,' and 'Hugh Trevor'; and his best-known play is the 'Road to Ruin.' He produced also an English version of the 'Marriage of Figaro.' The 'Memoirs, written by himself, and continued down to the time of his death, from his Diary Notes and other Papers,' were edited and completed by Hazlitt. They appeared in 1816.

191. 24. Hazlitt makes a curious mistake. Chaucer does not describe the scholar as going "sounding on his way," but says "sownynge in moral vertu was his speche," where "sownynge in" means "tending to." There is, perhaps, some confusion with a line in Wordsworth's 'Excursion,' Bk. iii. :—

"The intellectual power through words and things,
Went sounding on a dim and perilous way."

There is a similar allusion to Coleridge in the 'Spirit of the Age': "Mr Coleridge is too rich in intellectual wealth to need to task himself to any drudgery: he has only to draw the sliders of his imagination and a thousand subjects expand before him, startling him with their brilliancy or losing themselves in endless obscurity. . . . He walks abroad in the majesty of an universal understanding, eyeing the 'rich strond' or golden sky above him, and 'goes sounding on his way' in eloquent accents, uncompelled and free!"

192. 6. See above, 185. 31.

192. 11. Credat Judæus Apella! Horace, 'Satires,' i. 5. 100.

192. 14. choke-pears. Originally the name of a harsh, unpalatable variety of pear, now used only in the figurative sense of something difficult or impossible to "swallow," understand, &c.

192. 23. Dr Johnson. See Boswell's 'Life,' *sub anno* 1763: "I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered—striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it—"I refute it *thus*."

192. 28. Tom Paine (1737-1809), author of the 'Rights of

Man' (a reply to Burke's 'Reflections on the French Revolution'), the 'Age of Reason,' &c.

193. 4. Cf. note on p. 20, l. 3 *et seq.*

193. 14. This was the subject of Hazlitt's first publication—'An Essay on the Principles of Human Action; being an Argument in Favour of the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind.' It did not appear till 1805, seven years after this meeting with Coleridge. "The only thing I ever piqued myself upon was the writing the 'Essay on the Principles of Human Action,'" says Hazlitt in the essay "On Great and Little Things" in 'Table-Talk.'

193. 17. Hazlitt alludes to his early difficulties in writing also in his essays "On Application to Study" and "On Reading Old Books" in the 'Plain Speaker.'

194. 8. Paley. See above, 177. 23.

195. 5. The other 'Vision of Judgment' is Byron's, a satire on the panegyric which Southey, then Poet-Laureate, had produced on the occasion of the death of George III. Byron had difficulty in finding a publisher, but his 'Vision' appeared at last in the first number (1822) of the 'Liberal,' under the title "The Vision of Judgment, by Quevedo Redivivus; suggested by the composition so entitled by the author of 'Wat Tyler.'" In March 1822 Byron had written to Moore: "The Quevedo (one of my best in that line) has appalled the Row already, and must take its chance in Paris, if at all"; but it ultimately became the property of John Murray, Byron's usual publisher. Murray was also publisher of the 'Quarterly,' a fact to which Hazlitt refers in the phrase "the Secretary of the Bridge Street Junto." The 'Quarterly' had been established, with the approval of the Tory Government, to counteract the Whig politics of the 'Edinburgh.' "The pay will be as high as the 'Edinburgh,'" wrote Southey in November 1808, "and such political information as is necessary will be communicated from official sources, for, in plain English, the Ministry set it up. But they wish it not to wear a party appearance" (see the 'Memoirs of Hazlitt,' 1867, vol. i. p. 245). It was largely contributed to by Government officials, such as John Wilson Croker, Secretary to the Admiralty, and hence the name of the "Bridge Street Junto" given by politicians of the opposite camp, Bridge Street being at Westminster. A reference to the "government-scribblers" who made up the "Bridge Street Junto" will be found in

Hazlitt's essay "On Jealousy and the Spleen of Party" in the 'Plain Speaker.'

196. 10. Tewkesbury. At Bridgewater, according to the essay, "On going a Journey," in 'Table-Talk': "I remember sitting up half the night to read 'Paul and Virginia,' which I picked up at an inn at Bridgewater, after being drenched in the rain all day; and at the same place I got through two volumes of Madame D'Arblay's 'Camilla.'"

'Paul and Virginia,' by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1737-1814), published in 1788.

196. 27. Cf. p. 175, l. 14.

197. 3. 'Camilla,' the third novel of Fanny Burney (1752-1840), afterwards Madame D'Arblay, published in 1796.

197. 23. "the scales that fence." Cf. p. 67, l. 4.

198. 25. the ballad of Betty Foy—*i.e.*, Wordsworth's 'Idiot Boy'; the 'Mad Mother'—*i.e.*, Wordsworth's 'Her Eyes are Wild.' The 'Thorn' and 'The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman' are also by Wordsworth.

198. 31. "In spite of pride," &c. Pope, 'Essay on Man,' i. 293.

199. 5. "while yet the trembling year." Thomson, 'Spring,' l. 18. Cf. p. 153.

199. 8. "Of Providence," &c. 'Paradise Lost,' ii. 559, 560.

200. 9. Chantrey, Sir Francis (1781-1842), one of the chief English sculptors, elected a member of the Royal Academy in 1818.

200. 10. Haydon, Benjamin Robert (1786-1846). His picture of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, which was exhibited by himself in 1820, is generally considered his best work.

200. 22. Lewis, Matthew Gregory (1775-1818), received the sobriquet of "Monk Lewis" from the 'Monk,' a romance which he brought out in 1795. 'Castle Spectre,' a dramatic romance, was produced in December 1797 and published in 1798.

201. 7. "his face was as a book," &c. 'Macbeth,' I. v. 63, 64. Cf. p. 73, l. 10.

201. 32. Tom Poole (1765-1837), a wealthy tanner, who gave Coleridge considerable pecuniary assistance. They met in 1794, and remained life-long friends. Poole was a self-educated man, but he had several literary acquaintances. It was he who introduced Coleridge to Wedgwood. See

'Thomas Poole and his Friends,' by Mrs Henry Sandford, 1888.

202. 8. "followed in the chase," &c. 'Othello,' II. iii. 369, 370.

202. 31. **Gaspar Poussin** (1613-1675). His real name was Dughet, but he changed it out of respect to his master and brother-in-law, Nicolas Poussin (see above, 83. 28).

202. 32. **Domenichino**, or Domenico Zampieri (1581-1641), a painter of the Bolognese school.

204. 25. Why Coleridge—or Hazlitt—should have chosen "the days of Henry II." it is difficult to say. Fortunately there is no such allusion in the preface to the 'Lyrical Ballads,' or in any of Wordsworth's or Coleridge's statements of their views on poetry.

204. 33. Cf. Wordsworth's attitude, p. 176, ll. 29, 30.

205. 12. '**Caleb Williams**.' See above, 189. 31.

205. 16. "ribbed sea-sand." 'The Ancient Mariner,' l. 227: part of the two lines contributed by Wordsworth.

205. note. **Buffamalco**, more correctly Buffalmacco (1262-c.1351), an early Florentine painter. He is referred to several times in Boccaccio's 'Decameron.' His real name was Cristofani Buonamico.

206. 31. **Elliston**, Robert William (1774-1831). Leigh Hunt declared him to be "the only genius that has approached Garrick in universality of imitation." 'Remorse' was produced at Drury Lane in January 1813. It was recast from a play which Coleridge had written by 1797 and had called 'Osorio.'

207. 1. Coleridge was in Germany from September 1798 till the following June.

207. 7. Southey's 'Commonplace Book' was published in 1849-1851.

207. 13. Hazlitt had quarrelled with Lamb, as with almost all his old friends. The cause of the breach is not known, but Lamb's manly defence of Hazlitt in the "Letter of Elia to Robert Southey, Esq." ('London Magazine,' October 1823) led to their friendship being firmly restored. "What hath soured him"—*i.e.*, Hazlitt,—says Lamb, "and made him to suspect his friends of infidelity towards him when there was no such matter, I know not. I stood well with him for fifteen years (the proudest of my life), and have ever spoken my full mind of him to some to whom his panegyric must naturally be least tasteful.

I never in thought swerved from him ; I never betrayed him ; I never slackened in my admiration of him. . . . I wish he would not quarrel with the world at the rate he does. . . . I should belie my own conscience if I said less than that I think W. H. to be, in his natural and healthy state, one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing." Shortly afterwards Hazlitt wrote : "I think I must be friends with Lamb again, since he has written that magnanimous 'Letter to Southey'" ("On the Pleasure of Hating," in the 'Plain Speaker').

207. 15. "But there is matter," &c. Wordsworth, 'Hart-leap Well,' ll. 95, 96.

